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D. Morgan Trujillo

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CHRIST PANTOCRATOR: THE UNSETTLED DEBATE OVER THE  
HUMANITY AND DIVINITY OF JESUS

D. Morgan Trujillo

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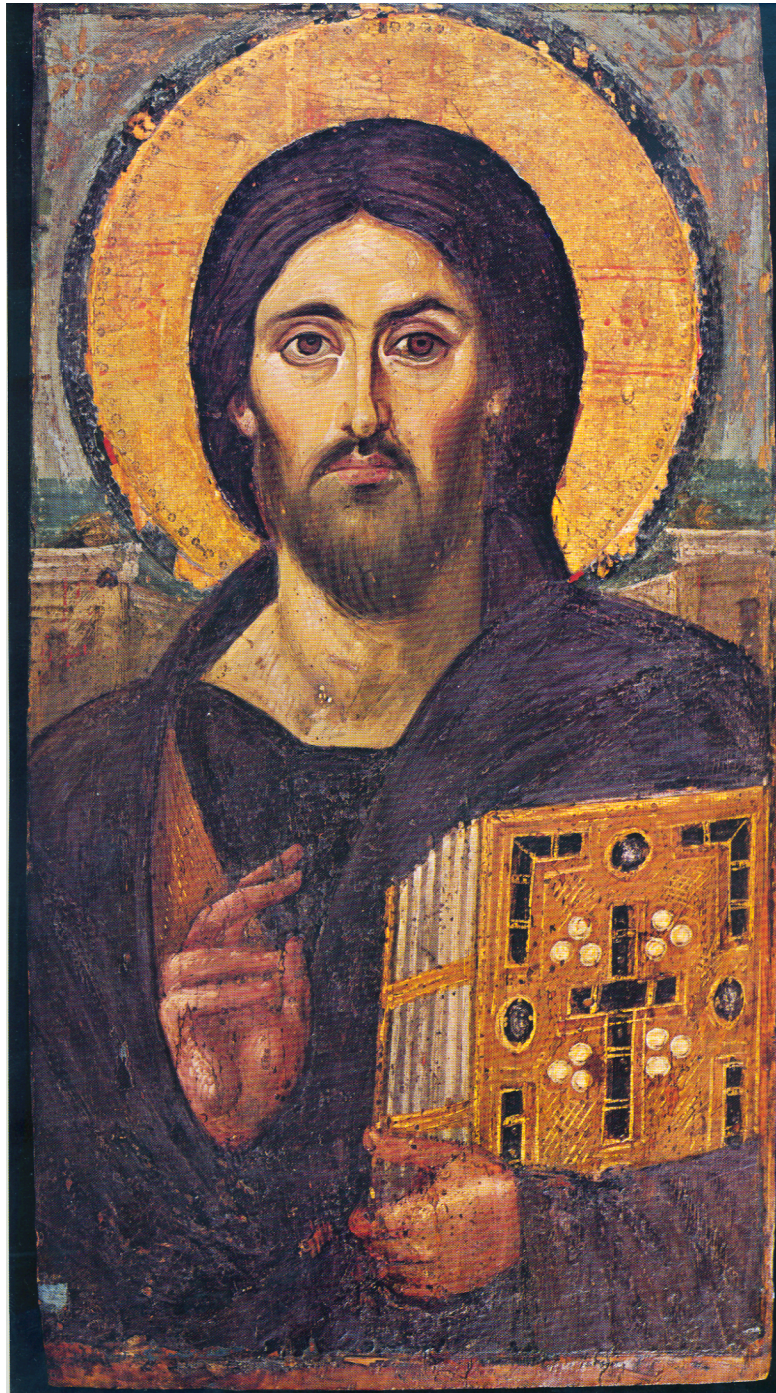


Figure 1. Sinai Christ Pantocrator<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All images unless otherwise noted are reprinted from Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai, The Icons: Volume One: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.



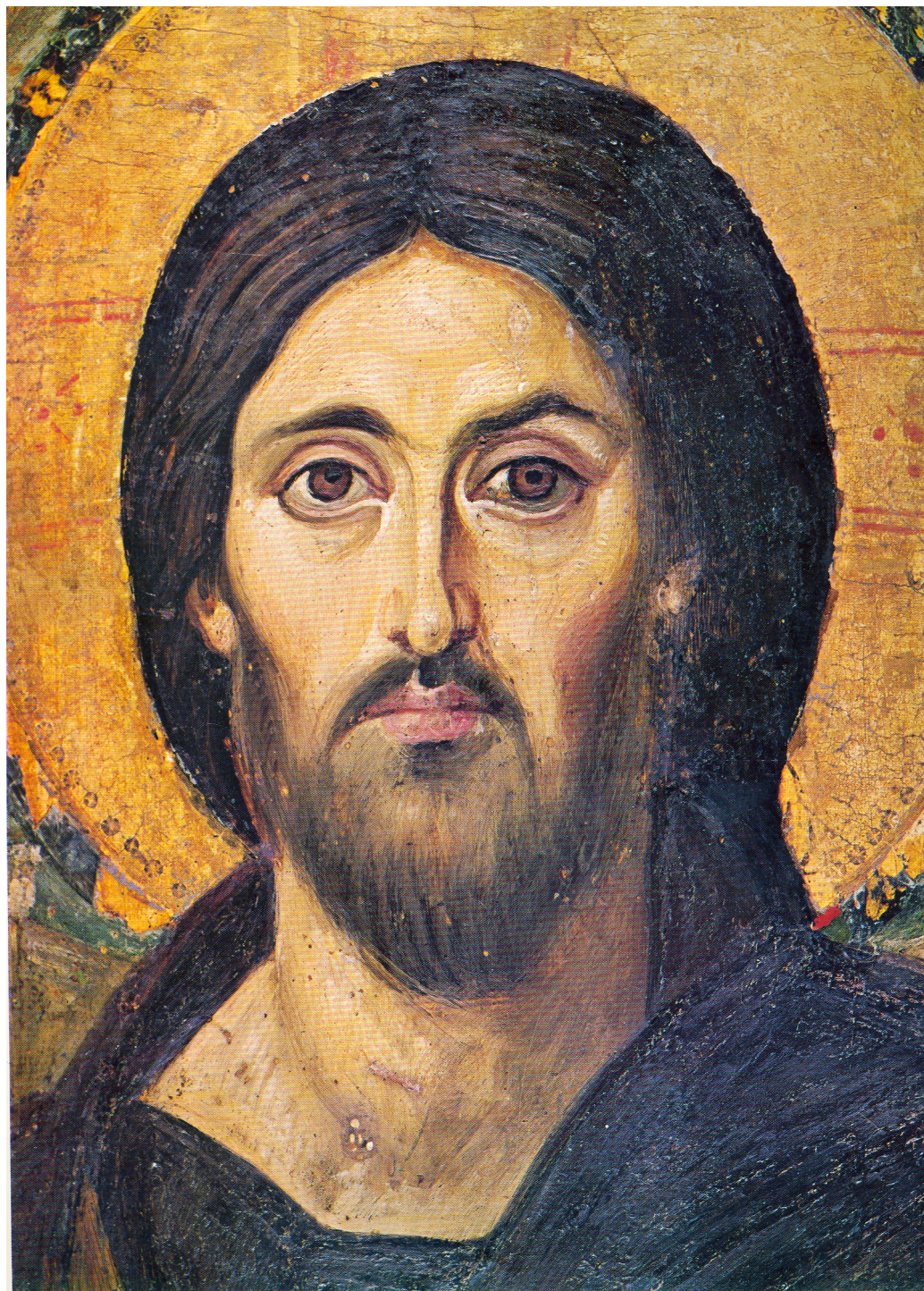


Figure 2. Detail of Sinai Christ Pantocrator



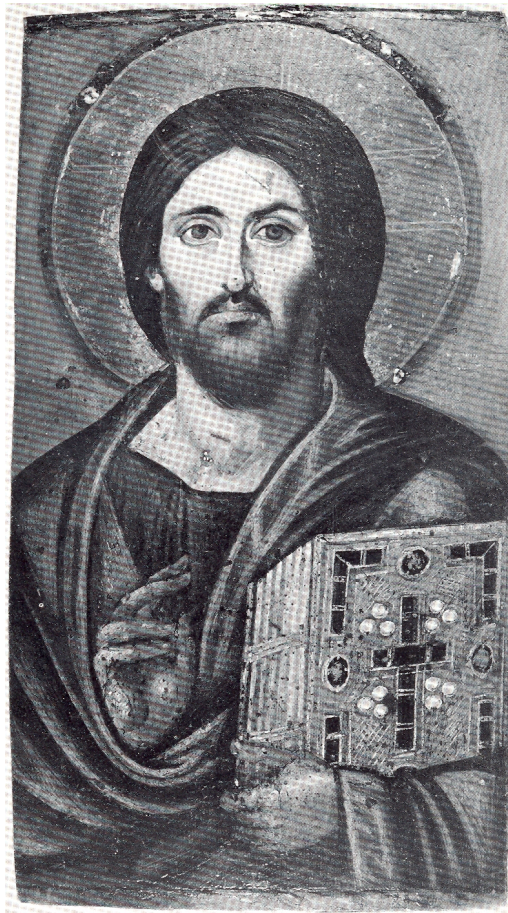


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Figure 5. Sinai Virgin between St. Theodore and St. George





Figure 6. Sinai St. Peter





Figure 7. Hosios Lukas narthex Christ Pantocrator<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted from Theodoros Papadakis and Spyros Meletzis, *Hosios Lukas: And Its Byzantine Mosaics*, München: Schnell & Steiner, 1969.





Figure 8. Daphni Christ Pantocrator<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted from Chris Hellier, *Monasteries of Greece*, London: Parke Books, 1996.

## **INTRODUCTION TO CHRIST PANTOCRATOR**

The Christ Pantocrator encaustic painting of Saint Catherine's monastery, in the Sinai Mountains of Egypt, is one of the few remaining Byzantine Christian images from the period prior to iconoclasm.<sup>4</sup> The Sinai Christ Pantocrator painting is dated to the sixth century, and is believed to originate from Constantinople. Christ Pantocrator is relevant for study because the facial expression of Christ Pantocrator distinctly depicts the divine and human natures of Jesus as Christ. While clearly incorporating both the divine and human elements within the face, Christ Pantocrator displays a holistic balance between the lifelike expression of the face and the divine positioning of his body.

In this paper, I will explore the historical understanding of the divine and human natures of Jesus as Christ, particularly how early Christians came to terms with these seemingly incompatible aspects. The Christ Pantocrator painting encompasses the attempt of Christians to reconcile each nature with the other while still preserving the integrity of their developing faith. Early Christians tried to understand how to incorporate the man, Jesus of Nazareth, with the divine Christ figure who was resurrected and ascended to heaven. Much of the early ecclesiastical history of the Byzantine Empire was occupied

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<sup>4</sup> Iconoclasm lasted from roughly 730 A.D. to 843 A.D., a time in which religious images were destroyed while the Christian Church debated the purpose and appropriate form of these images.

with empire-wide church councils that debated understandings of their monotheistic religion, which grappled with a single deity that had both a divine and human aspect. I use the Christ Pantocrator painting to examine the contemporary historical controversies and to show the struggle of early Christians to understand the complexity of Jesus as Christ.

### **Perceived Schism or Holy Unity?**

Christ Pantocrator shows the divine and human natures of Jesus as Christ in a holistic balance. In addition to the depiction of the divinity and humanity within the face, there is a larger balance between the realistic human expressions of the face and the stereotypical divine position within the painting. The utilization of a split face to display each nature of Jesus as Christ is a complex and holistic presentation of two elements that are seemingly incompatible, but unite to present one collective whole.

Christ Pantocrator employs exquisite artistry, and the realism of the expressions is unmatched in any other Byzantine icon. The divine and human elements are not in opposition; thus, the face is not actually split. Each nature blends seamlessly with the other, creating a dynamic harmony. Although the face separately displays the human and divine halves of Jesus as Christ, the artist's ability to bring unity between the two natures throughout the painting is impressive. When viewing the face as a whole entity, the expressive human features employed in the face causes it to be viewed as an artistically well-



developed human face. It does not have the expressionless golden face, lacking dimension, that so many other Byzantine icons incorporate to only show the divinity of the figure depicted. Rather, Christ Pantocrator's face, when taken as a complete unit, is viewed as a life-like depiction of the man, Jesus of Nazareth. When viewed as a complete picture, Christ Pantocrator presents a masterful attempt to balance the human and divine natures, both within the face and when the face is in context of the divine positioning of the body.

Christ Pantocrator is the single most important image still existing from the early Christian Empire, which is generally considered to be from 330 A.D. to 843 A.D., because it captures the moment where Jesus is both divine and human. The expression of both the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ is a rare depiction in Christian art, particularly Byzantine Christian art. While theological controversy continually erupted in the Early Byzantine Empire, Christ Pantocrator incorporates the issues from these debates. Christ Pantocrator illustrates the struggle to understand the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ. Ultimately Christ Pantocrator is the solution to achieve holistic unity. Christ Pantocrator depicts the harmony between each nature, which is the solution that the councils concluded.

I use the approach of studying the art, specifically this icon, to better understand the history of the Christological development in the early Byzantine church. The depiction of Jesus as Christ in this icon is the paramount image to use to study these historical controversies, which are discussed in detail in

chapter two. Christ Pantocrator clearly highlights the struggle over how, if at all, the divine nature of Jesus as Christ should be portrayed.

Later Christ Pantocrator images from after iconoclasm show the continued attempt of artists to illustrate both natures of Jesus as Christ according to the decisions of the Church-wide councils of the previous centuries. In chapter three, I look at two eleventh century Christ Pantocrator mosaics from Byzantine monasteries in mainland Greece. The Christ Pantocrator mosaics of the Daphni and Hosios Lukas monasteries show individuals continued struggle over how to portray both natures in a way that conforms to the official Church position.

### **Terminology**

It is inaccurate in trying to understand these early theological questions to use the phrase “Jesus Christ.” By doing so, a concise and unquestionable understanding of the two natures is assumed—he is both human and divine, and no further understanding is necessary, almost as if Jesus was his first name, and Christ was his last. In this paper, I do not employ this problematic title, and choose instead to use the term “Jesus as Christ” to speak about the person who is the man, Jesus of Nazareth, who is also treated as the Christ figure.

The title Christ Pantocrator is derived from the Greek word *pantokrator*, meaning the Divine Ruler of the Universe. This title designates that it is Jesus, not in the form of an infant or a man, but in the form of his Christ figure role, that is the Divine Ruler of the Universe. The term Christ Pantocrator is not

specific to this painting; there are many Byzantine icons with the title Christ Pantocrator. The symbolic elements that signify Jesus as Christ Pantocrator are his golden nimbus, his right hand in the form of the blessing gesture, his left hand holding a Gospel book. In these paintings and mosaics his hair and moustache are usually brown, parted and swept to one side. Generally, it is more common for the Gospel book to be open, but the Sinai Christ Pantocrator, and other images to which it is connected, is a little unusual in that the Gospel book is closed.

### **History of Saint Catherine's Monastery**

Saint Catherine's monastery is nestled between rocky crags in the desolate mountains of Sinai, Egypt. It is the oldest continually operating Christian monastery in the world. The monastery was built in the mountains where Moses reportedly saw the burning bush and later brought the tablets given by God down to the ancient Israelites in the book of Exodus. The site has been long inhabited by ascetics, documented as early as 380 A.D., when the nun Egeria visited the Sinai Mountains and encountered ascetic holy men. There was already an established church and a tradition of worship centered on the events documented in Exodus when Egeria visited.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robert S. Nelson, "Where God Walked and Monks Pray." In *Holy Image, Hollowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, edited by Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 1-10.

It is on this historic biblical location that the Byzantine emperor Justinian, who reigned from 527 A.D. to 565 A.D., built Saint Catherine's. As part of Justinian's famed building program, the monastery was built in accordance with an empire-wide effort to reinvigorate the connection between Christianity and the sites of biblical events. The monastery contained a chapel that was standard at the time: an isled basilica with a timber roof. The builder of the monastery was Stephen of Aila, a local man who used predominantly local materials.<sup>6</sup> The mosaicist who decorated the monastery was from Constantinople, and used marble and materials from the city, and the completed artwork was taken to Sinai. The decor originating from Constantinople is significant because it shows that while the monastery was for many centuries outside of the Byzantine Empire, as seen by the clear preservation of its structure and artifacts, the monastery's religious interior design came from Constantinople, which was the center of Christian thought at the time.

During the period of iconoclasm, when a great many icons within the empire were destroyed, the icons in St. Catherine's were untouched. They were preserved because during the iconoclastic period, which ran roughly from 726 A.D. to 843 A.D., Egypt was not part of the Byzantine Empire. During iconoclasm, Egypt was ruled by the Muslim Umayyad Caliphate, who permitted the practice of Christianity to continue, and allowed the Christians to maintain their use of iconography. Due to its isolation, Saint Catherine's houses many of

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Maas, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 357-8.

the few remaining icons that pre-date the iconoclastic period. These rare images from early Christianity are key examples of religious art during that time.

### **Scholarly Resources**

Most scholars neglect the historical and religious significance of the Christ Pantocrator icon and instead study it within the context of its artistic value. Kurt Weitzmann, a professor and researcher at Princeton University, died in 1993 and was the foremost scholar of Saint Catherine's monastery. I rely on him as the most authoritative recent scholar of the Christ Pantocrator icon. Ernst Kitzinger, a scholar at Dumbarton Oaks who also taught at Harvard University, died in 2003 and also studied the art of Saint Catherine's. Weitzmann and Kitzinger were responsible for the excavation, preservation, and documentation for many of the buildings and icons in the monastery. Both published collections of articles that deal specifically with the art of Mount Sinai and devoted a portion of their research to the Christ Pantocrator icon. Weitzmann wrote the most specifically about Christ Pantocrator, and Kitzinger briefly touched on the icon in his study of Saint Catherine's and other early Mediterranean artwork.

The most extensive written work on the Christ Pantocrator icon is by Weitzmann in the collection *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai, The Icons: Volume One: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century*.<sup>7</sup> The collection is part of the results from the University of Michigan and Princeton University

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<sup>7</sup> Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai, The Icons: Volume One: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).



expeditions to collect and document the art of Mount Sinai. Weitzmann's *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai* serves as the primary source when analyzing or discussing the Christ Pantocrator icon in the context of this paper.

Weitzmann begins the catalogue of icons in *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai* with the Christ Pantocrator, giving clear descriptions of the exact physical appearance of the icon, with attention to the measurements and state of the materials. Due to a detailed examination of the wood and paint used in the icon, he determined that the icon is not from the thirteenth century, which was largely assumed. After the cleaning of the icon, Weitzmann concluded that several shoddy repairs and additions to the icon occurred during the medieval period, which is why the icon was dated to the thirteenth century for so long. Christ Pantocrator is one painting in a series of three icons from Saint Catherine's monastery. Weitzmann compares the three paintings to draw connections between the icons to determine the sixth century date, and additionally to find common similarities in paint, style, background and punched rosettes.

In addition to dating, Weitzmann connects Christ Pantocrator with Constantinople, concluding the icons origins in the imperial city. Weitzmann definitively concludes from analyzing the paintings together as a trio that they were crafted in Constantinople during the reign of Justinian. He believes that this icon is likely to have originated in Constantinople, was largely influential in Imperial coinage, and is clearly connected to Emperor Justinian, who ruled from

527 A.D. to 565 A.D. Weitzmann also focuses on the detailing in the facial expression of the icon. He describes the lack of symmetry that creates a sense of detached aloofness in Christ Pantocrator's expression. He explicitly states that the lack of symmetry, specifically in the eyes, to be the clear separation or definition of the human and divine natures of Jesus as Christ.

Christ Pantocrator is a fascinating window on how the early Byzantines understood their religion, and the nature of Jesus as Christ that they sought to clarify. Christ Pantocrator shows an elegant harmony between the distinct natures depicted in the face, a holistic balance between the frame of the divine Christ Pantocrator positioning and the life-like human expressions seen in the face. The Christological controversies that were hotly contested throughout the Byzantine Empire are captured in the Christ Pantocrator icon. Although I argue that ultimately Christ Pantocrator presents the natures of Jesus as Christ in a manner according to the conclusion of the ecumenical councils, the Church was not able to realize the accomplished beauty within the icon and utilize Christ Pantocrator as the standard of iconic depiction after the end of iconoclasm.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Problem of the Divided Face

Weitzmann's artistic analysis attributes each side of the face of Christ Pantocrator with a nature of Jesus as Christ, arguing that the right half of the face is the expression of his divine nature, and the left half an expression of his human nature. The divine half of the face appears almost blank, with an aloofness that expresses a removed and distant divinity. The human half of the face appears darker, perhaps expressing anger or even harshness. The strong emotion that is expressed in the human half highlights the depth of human expression. This prominent display of deep emotion shows that on occasion humans cannot control their emotion, which is in contrast to the stoic divine face.

Frederica Mathewes-Green, a recent convert to Greek Orthodoxy, writes of her love and devotion as a worshiper of the Christ Pantocrator icon. She is the only available source who described the human half of Christ's face as playful, humorous, and in lively motion.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps her opinion of the human nature as lighthearted is a reflection of a twenty-first century worshipper finding an uplifting way to connect to Christ Pantocrator.

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<sup>8</sup> Frederica Mathewes-Green, *The Open Door: Entering the Sanctuary of Icons and Prayer* (Orleans: Paraclete Press, 2003), 3-24.

The distinction between the divine and the human halves of Christ Pantocrator continue down to the hands. Christ's right hand, on his divine side, is elegant and ethereal in the form of the blessing gesture. The left hand, on his human side, is dark and curled around a book, which is assumed to be a Gospel that documents the life of Jesus as a man on earth.<sup>9</sup>

The distinct elements of the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ blend together in Christ Pantocrator in a subtle elegant harmony. Each half of the face is a clear expression of one of the natures of Jesus as Christ. Each half interacts with the other to show both elements of Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ figure in a dynamic unity with one another. They are separate and distinct from the other, but also in a perfect harmony, balancing the face equally. In addition to the harmonious balance of the face that expresses the human and divine natures, the painting of Christ Pantocrator as a whole shows a balance between these natures. Although the face shows humanity and divinity distinctly, because of the expressive realism employed by the artist, the face of Christ Pantocrator cannot help but show an intriguing human face. The lifelike element of the face demonstrates that the humanity of Jesus as Christ cannot be overlooked or consumed by his divinity. The realistic human face set in the physical frame of the Christ Pantocrator position incorporates divinity. Because of the divine physical positioning, such as the nimbus, Gospel book and blessing gesture, the human face is set within the frame of a divine structure. This relationship of the

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<sup>9</sup> Mount Holyoke College students Laura Appel and Amany Soliman, in conversation with author, February 1, 2008.

human face in a divine structure can be interpreted as a metaphor for the Church that imposed the divine structure for the man, Jesus of Nazareth, to fit within.

The Christ Pantocrator icon is a perfect blend of each nature of Jesus as Christ in accordance with the issues raised by the church councils of the early Byzantine period, which occurred from the fourth century through the ninth century. These official church councils were held to resolve theological disputes within Christianity, many of which determined the official Church position on issues regarding the natures of Jesus as Christ. The Christ Pantocrator icon expresses exactly what the Church ultimately decreed as the acceptable form of iconic depiction of Jesus as Christ, that is, he is fully human and fully divine and each nature is distinct but in harmony with the other. Although Christ Pantocrator accurately depicts both natures as the Church had decreed should be done, later icons, such as the Christ Pantocrator, in the Deesis panel of the Hagia Sophia church in Constantinople, do not follow the decision of the Church councils. These later icons allow the human nature of Jesus as Christ to be consumed by the divinity, typified by flat, dimensionless space, expressing an abstract, non-human feeling of divine ethos. It seems clear that the Church was not able to recognize the Christ Pantocrator icon as a solution to the issues raised in the Christological controversies of the early Byzantine period. Rather, it can tentatively be suggested that had members of the Church taken an official position Christ Pantocrator, it would have been viewed as an icon depicting

heretical positions on the relationship of the divine and human natures of Jesus as Christ.

The early Christians of the Byzantine Empire struggled with the problem of the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ for several hundred years. From the followers of Jesus to the later fathers of the Christian Church, there was an ongoing attempt to understand the divine nature of Jesus as Christ. The man Jesus of Nazareth was elevated from a rabbi to a divine being by his followers. The authority that came with Jesus' status as the Son of God and the Christ was used by followers of the Christian faith to legitimize their faith during the periods of the greatest persecution under the Roman Empire.

By the sixth century, the need to legitimize the Christian faith through an emphasis on the divinity of Jesus as Christ had passed. These Christians were no longer struggling to prove the godlike nature of Jesus, but rather were laboring to understand how to find a harmony between the divine and human sides of Jesus the Christ. This ongoing struggle to create a unified balance between the two natures lasted for centuries. Even after the councils officially resolved the Christological controversies, some Christian artists struggled to depict Jesus as Christ according to the resolution of the councils.

### **The Artistic Elements of Christ Pantocrator**

Christ Pantocrator is artistically very different from later Byzantine icons. Most early icons of Jesus as Christ were destroyed and therefore cannot be used

for comparison. Christ Pantocrator's distinction from other icons, both contemporary and from later Byzantium requires a careful examination of the artistic elements that separate it from other Byzantine icons.

Christ Pantocrator was painted in the encaustic technique, which uses hot wax combined with pigment that is then applied to a thin wood canvas. It measures 84cm in height, 45.5cm in width, and is 1.2cm thick. Weitzmann believes that two planks of the wood canvas were cut off of the side of the painting, so that it now stands as a tall rectangular icon, whereas it once was square. The painting exhibits signs of aging due to canvas warping, paint chipping, and subsequent cracking around the edge of the wood canvas. The original painting is also damaged on the right, over the portion of Christ Pantocrator's left ear, hair, and jawbone. A crude repair job was executed sometime in the thirteenth century. The Greek restoration specialist Tassos Margaritoff of the Byzantine Museum of Athens restored the icon in 1962. Prior to the restoration, the painting was dated to the thirteenth century. Margaritoff's repair and restoration removed paint that had been added in the thirteenth century and enabled scholars to date the painting to the sixth century more accurately. During Margaritoff's restoration, the large damaged patch around Christ Pantocrator's left ear and hair was repaired using modern paint and restoration techniques.

Christ Pantocrator is dressed in a dark purple mantle; the dark cloth serves as a simple background for the greater details of the painting found in his face and

hands.<sup>10</sup> Beneath the purple robe, a golden strip of the clavus peeks out.<sup>11</sup> The hands of Christ Pantocrator are highly detailed; his left holds a bejeweled Gospel. The Gospel in Christ Pantocrator's left hand is a thick leather book, decorated with blue precious stones in the form of a cross, and clustered pearls adorn the cross. Although the book is closed, similar Christ Pantocrator paintings hold books open with verses from the Gospels written inside. Christ Pantocrator's right hand is positioned in the blessing gesture, which is formed by the ring finger and fourth finger meeting the thumb, with the first and middle fingers extended, but slightly bent. The blessing gesture can also be formed by the thumb, first, and second fingers outstretched with the third and fourth fingers not in contact with the thumb, but rather curling inward to rest on the palm.<sup>12</sup>

Christ Pantocrator faces the viewer with his left shoulder turned slightly forward. He is positioned in front of a golden niche that is set in the distance behind him. This niche has carved window slits and is topped by a white horizontal decorative molding. Beyond the niche is a green landscape with a blue sky. Inside of the spandrels, the sky contains large eight-pointed carved brown stars. The distance of the niche and landscape provide a sense of disconnectedness from the physical earth. Both the niche and the landscape are

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<sup>10</sup> All descriptions which use directions such as left and right will always be given from the perspective of Christ, not the viewer, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>11</sup> The clavus is a strip of fabric on Roman tunics, usually worn by senators.

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Speake writes that medieval Christians understood first three fingers in this gesture to symbolize the Holy Trinity, and the tucked third and fourth fingers symbolize the dual human and divine natures of Jesus as Christ. This later interpretation of the gesture placed great symbolism on a simple hand formation, which should not necessarily be applied to Christ Pantocrator, because the significance of the Trinity was not well developed in the sixth century as later during the medieval period. Jennifer Speake, Jennifer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Symbols in Christian Art* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 1994), 63.



lacking perspective and appear almost flat in contrast with the detail and realism applied to the face and hands of Christ. This allows the viewer to focus on the majesty of the portrayal of Jesus as Christ.

A large gold nimbus surrounds the head. A deep blue border outlines the nimbus. A red speck remains above the left shoulder on the nimbus border as a remnant of a later border painted over the original. Inside the nimbus border are stamped eight-petaled rosettes. This painting, along with the Sinai Virgin icon, the second part of a trio of encaustic paintings at Sinai to which Christ Pantocrator belongs, is the earliest known example of the punched rosette technique. A faded red cross painted in double lines appears behind Christ Pantocrator's head and is also, according to Weitzmann, a later addition to the painting.<sup>13</sup>

There is a split almost exactly down the center of Christ Pantocrator's face, as if there is an attempt to express a separation between the divine and human natures. A warm ivory tone comprises much of Christ Pantocrator's facial coloring. White pigment accents places where light descending from the upper right corner hits the face, primarily on the forehead. On the right side of the face, the light highlights principally the eye, the cheekbone, and the nose. This white pigment is also used on the left side of the face, but almost exclusively around the eye.

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<sup>13</sup> Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai*, 15.

On the left side of the face, strong shadows accent the brow and cheek, in strong contrast to the bright highlights of the left side of the face. There are prominent brown shadows on the left cheek, as well as on the left side of the ridge of the nose. A grey olive tone creates shadows and darker areas on the neck, below the lips, below the eyebrows, and within the lower portion of the eye. The pupils of the eyes are black with brown irises outlined in black. Bright carmine is used on the lips and the eyelids. The brown hair that surrounds the face is accented with the same purple used in the mantle. The brown and purple tones create unity between the hair and cloth that serve as a backdrop for the highly detailed face.

Christ Pantocrator's body is turned slightly, making the painting multi-dimensional. Christ Pantocrator's turned shoulders complement the asymmetry in his facial expressions. His hair and mustache are parted off to the right side, and his beard is combed to the opposite direction of the parted hair. The clear parts in the hair and mustache mimic and support the division between the expressions on left and right sides of the face. His eyes are open, but the eyes and pupils are not on the same level, emphasizing the "effect of aloofness and timelessness."<sup>14</sup> The left eye is larger than the right, and placed higher on the face. The right eye has a delicately arched eyebrow that follows the shape of the open eyelid, giving the eye an almost expressionless quality. The left eyebrow

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<sup>14</sup> Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai*, 15.

is significantly arched in three separate segments and is placed considerably higher above the eyelid invoking a feeling of anger or sternness.

The asymmetrical nature of the eyes and hair combing creates a sense of expressive movement within the face. Kitiznger attributes this painting to 700 A.D., which may be incorrect, as most scholars agree with Weitzmann's dating of the icon to the sixth century. Attributing Christ Pantocrator to this era allows for this icon to be the most accomplished of the few remaining icons of the early Christian period.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Artistic Problem**

Christ Pantocrator is artistically problematic precisely because it is unusual and distinctly different from later Byzantine religious art. Typically, later Byzantine art portrays Jesus as Christ with a flat golden face, lacking dimension and movement, a long curved nose, and an expression of an ethereal divine being, none of which are characteristic of a human worshipper. This standard portrayal of Jesus as Christ as a divine being creates a distinction between the earthly viewer and the heavenly image. The expressive realism of Christ Pantocrator is an important technique because it emphasizes the human and divine natures of Jesus as Christ. It highlights the lifelike essence of Jesus as Christ that the viewer can find a personal connection with.

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<sup>15</sup> Ernst Kitiznger, *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 120-121.

Because few religious icons survived the iconoclastic movement, it is unclear if there was a norm or standard for accepted early Byzantine religious imagery. Thus, it is possible that because later icons are so vastly different from Christ Pantocrator, the conception of acceptable icons after iconoclasm had changed. Due to the lack of pre-iconoclastic art, it is exceptional among what remains of the contemporary icons. Kitzinger suggests that this painting is one of the finest and, “. . . last great achievements of Byzantine religious art before iconoclasm. This is quintessentially what an icon was at the time the crisis [of iconoclasm] erupted.”<sup>16</sup> While few contemporary icons remain for comparison, Kitzinger’s assertion is that not only is Christ Pantocrator one of the most artistically advanced icons of Greek Orthodoxy, but the icon was also an imperially and Church accepted form of depicting Jesus as Christ.

It is probable that Kitzinger is correct in his statement that Christ Pantocrator is the finest example of what a highly accomplished icon looked like prior to iconoclasm, because the icon was an officially commissioned icon created in the capital of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople.<sup>17</sup> Icons commissioned and constructed in Constantinople are believed to reflect the imperial and Church-promoted form of religious art. If Christ Pantocrator was indeed the predominant form of icons directly prior to iconoclasm, it can be assumed that as a result of the iconoclastic controversy, Christ Pantocrator did not become the

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<sup>16</sup> Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 120-121.

<sup>17</sup> See the following section on the historical issues surrounding Christ Pantocrator for further discussion of the paintings origins in Constantinople.

standard for later icons and, in fact, was never copied or promoted in an officially accepted form. Precisely because it was not copied and the standard for icons changed, it can tentatively be suggested that Christ Pantocrator was considered highly problematic after iconoclasm, as it is indicative of icons from a time that were purposefully destroyed.

Christ Pantocrator shows a fleeting moment captured; Christ eternal paused for a moment as man. The artist has attempted to catch the real man, Jesus of Nazareth, and unify him with Christ eternal, essentially allowing the viewer to experience both the division and the harmony of human and divine. Christ Pantocrator has a more clearly accented human dimension than later Byzantine icons, which is precisely why the nature of Christ Pantocrator was likely considered so unacceptable to Church hierarchy following iconoclasm. In order to understand the artistic issues of Christ Pantocrator, we must also understand the historical context around Christ Pantocrator's creation to accurately place it in the context of the developing theology of the Christian Church.

### **The Historical Problem**

Although Kitzinger provides an eighth century date, Weitzmann attributes Christ Pantocrator to the sixth century and additional scholars such as Manolis Chatzidakis agree with Weitzmann. The conclusion of this date was not always apparent, and scholars originally incorrectly assumed a thirteenth century date of origin. Multiple historical comparisons and analyses have supported the

decisive sixth century date of origin. These historical clues include sixth century events in Constantinople gleaned from histories and remaining artifacts, analysis of related paintings at Saint Catherine's monastery, and finally a reflection on the development of Byzantine painting styles in the context of the development of theological doctrine. The sixth century date is supported by the restoration of Christ Pantocrator in the 1960s, its origin from the Byzantine capital city Constantinople, and surviving contemporary icons.

Christ Pantocrator was not always authoritatively dated to the sixth century due to a medieval addition, which complicated an accurate dating of the painting. Manolis Chatzidakis believes that during the late Byzantine period, 1204 A.D. to 1453 A.D., a restoration was completed in order to repair the large damaged portion around Christ Pantocrator's hair and left ear.<sup>18</sup> The Byzantine restoration covered the damaged portion with a large dark spot, which covered the hair, ear, temple and collar of Christ Pantocrator, omitting almost all detail of these features. The background was painted over with green, which was also used to paint over the drapery of the robe and the niche, removing almost all detail of the background. The result was a delicately detailed face of Jesus as Christ surrounded by a body and background comprised of primarily the same color, which presented a less dynamic relationship between the body of Christ Pantocrator and the background of the painting.

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<sup>18</sup> Manolis Chatzidakis, "An Encaustic Icon of Christ at Sinai," trans. Gerry Walters. *The Art Bulletin* 49, no. 3 (1967): 197.

Prior to restoration of Christ Pantocrator both appearance and technique was originally likened to fourteenth century Byzantine icons. Toward the end of the Byzantine Empire, religious art clearly developed a highly detailed style according to influences from Western Crusaders, to emphasize artistic ability and lifelike human expression. David Talbot Rice of the University of Edinburgh describes the artwork of the late Byzantine era as distinguishable by its “new vividness, its new humanism, and its new feeling for gaiety and decoration. The figures are more personal, more individual, the scenes are brighter and fuller, and there is a new concern with detail.”<sup>19</sup>

The Deesis mosaic in the southern gallery of the Hagia Sophia cathedral in Constantinople embodies the movement towards human expression and well-developed artisanship. The Western influences from the Crusades allowed for the beginning of what could have become a Byzantine Renaissance movement. This movement was ultimately quashed when the Ottoman Turks ended the Byzantine Empire by their invasion of Constantinople in 1453 A.D.

Because of the likeness of the pre-restoration Christ Pantocrator to these later Byzantine mosaics, scholars simply assumed an incorrect thirteenth-century dating. Due to the hasty assumption that Christ Pantocrator was a later Byzantine icon, it is clear that Christ Pantocrator was seemingly centuries before its time due to the developed artistry and expressive human detail. The revival of expressing human likeness in Christ icons toward the end of the Byzantine

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<sup>19</sup> David Talbot Rice, *Art of the Byzantine Era* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1963), 220.

Empire shows that perhaps the question of the extent that Christ's human nature should be expressed in an icon was not answered.

Weitzmann has drawn a strong connection between Christ Pantocrator and the capital city of Constantinople, based on surviving religious art and records of earlier icons that no longer survive. Christ Pantocrator exhibits several characteristic features such as parted hair, a beard, most importantly, a closed Gospel book and blessing symbol, which are common characteristics of this particular style of Christ Pantocrator. Weitzmann connects the important characteristics of this image to the emperor Justinian II, whose first reign was 685 A.D. to 695 A.D. Justinian II issued coins with the same Christ Pantocrator characteristics, symbolizing the imperial promotion of this form of Jesus as Christ depiction. Justinian II's Roman coin, or solidus,<sup>20</sup> is the first known example of the figure of Jesus as Christ used on Byzantine coins. As a result of this connection to Justinian II, Weitzmann comfortably attributes the Sinai Christ Pantocrator to imperial officially promoted imagery. The date of Christ Pantocrator's origin can be narrowed to sometime prior to the rule of Justinian II.<sup>21</sup>

Weitzmann is uncertain where, if it even existed, the prototype for the icon and solidus originated. He accepts the idea that the primary archetype originated from the image of Christ on the Chalke Gate, which stood over the

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<sup>20</sup> Solidus is the Roman word for the official coinage of the empire. The Byzantine emperors continued to issue coins in the tradition of the Roman solidus.

<sup>21</sup> Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai*, 14.



entrance to the imperial palatial complex in Constantinople sometime prior to 726 A.D. The Chalke Gate Christ Pantocrator was supposedly hacked to pieces by the iconoclastic emperor Leo III in 726 A.D., restored to the gate after the first period of iconoclasm ended, and again removed in 814 A.D. Post-iconoclastic Christ Pantocrator images, with inscriptions of O XAAKITHC (the Chalke), are considered possible reproductions of the original Chalke Gate Christ. However, these reproductions cannot conclusively be linked to the original Chalke Gate Christ because these images would have stemmed from the final replacement on the gate in 843 A.D., over a hundred years after the original.<sup>22</sup>

Manolis Chatzidakis, the founder of the Centre for Byzantine Art at the Academy of Athens, believes that there are multiple possible early icons that are now lost that could be the prototype for Christ Pantocrator.<sup>23</sup> He argues that the Chalke Gate Christ was designed in accordance with the prototype of the icon of Camuliana, considered to be *αχειροποιητος* (not made by human hands). The Camuliana icon was supposedly found miraculously and brought to Constantinople in 554 A.D, where multiple emperors used its miraculous essence to protect the Byzantine armies in battle. The most notable story involving the Camuliana icon occurred when the patriarch paraded it on a standard in order to protect Constantinople against the attacking Turkic Avars in

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<sup>22</sup> Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Chatzidakis, "An Encaustic Icon of Christ at Sinai," 202.

626 A.D. Events such as this, which used religious icons in military situations, later prompted the argument against the use of icons.

The icon of Christ Antiphonetes is another possible prototype of Christ Pantocrator that Chatzidakis has suggested.<sup>24</sup> Little about this icon is known except that an eleventh-century reproduction exists. The reproduction portrays Christ with the same characteristics as Christ Pantocrator, such as parted hair, a beard, a closed Gospel and a hand in the form of the blessing gesture. The existence of the Christ Antiphonetes icon indicates multiple icons similar to the Sinai Christ Pantocrator, which suggests that the Sinai Christ Pantocrator was a standard icon of its era.

Weitzmann and Chatzidakis date Christ Pantocrator according to contemporary icons and coinage. The contemporary icons that no longer remain suggest that Christ Pantocrators in Constantinople were prominent prior to iconoclasm. These strong connections, particularly the conclusion that Christ Pantocrator was the prototype of the solidus design, warrant the hypothesis that Christ Pantocrator was created, commissioned, or at least designed in Constantinople. With an origin in Constantinople, Christ Pantocrator's portrayal of both natures of Jesus as Christ can be considered an imperially accepted image.

In further support of the conclusion that Constantinople was the origin of Christ Pantocrator, the history of Saint Catherine's monastery had a strong

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<sup>24</sup> Chatzidakis, "An Encaustic Icon of Christ at Sinai," 202.

connection with the capital city. Saint Catherine's was built under the emperor Justinian I, who reigned from 527 to 565 A.D. Justinian constructed Saint Catherine's as part of his famed building program to reinvigorate his failing popularity by constructing new buildings throughout the Byzantine Empire. The mosaicist who decorated the interior of the monastery was from Constantinople. He used material from the city and likely transported the finished artwork to Saint Catherine's after completion. While Christ Pantocrator is not a mosaic, it is highly likely that it was also commissioned or created in Constantinople specifically for Saint Catherine's monastery.<sup>25</sup>

Thomas F. Mathews, professor of Art History at Yale University, supports the connection between Christ Pantocrator and the emperor Justinian. He suggests that Christ Pantocrator, along with two other encaustic icons, comprise a trio that was probably the personal votive offering of the Emperor Justinian to Saint Catherine's.<sup>26</sup> The trio of encaustic icons at Saint Catherine's also offers a more complete understanding of Christ Pantocrator. In addition to Christ Pantocrator, the Sinai trio includes an icon of the Virgin between Saint Theodore and Saint George and a Saint Peter icon. The three icons share physical similarities such as the use of wood canvases, similar physical dimensions, and the technique of encaustic paint combined with strong visible

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<sup>25</sup> Maas, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 357-8.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Mathews "Early Icons of the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai." In *Holy Image, Hollowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, edited by Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 51-2.

brush strokes. Each of the trio of icons has a dimensionless niche as a flat background that appears as if it does not surround or encompass the subject.

The strongest connection between the Virgin icon and Christ Pantocrator are the similar usage of the punching technique on the borders of the nimbi. These encaustic paintings are the earliest known example of the punching technique in Byzantine art. Kitzynger believes the Virgin icon dates to the seventh century. Weitzmann disagrees, and concurs with Georgios and Maria Sotiriou, the earliest scholars of the artwork within Saint Catherine's, who provide a sixth century date. Weitzmann believes that, "In comparison with the Christ icon, the Virgin icon may perhaps be a little later for but one reason: the niche behind the figures is higher and has lost somewhat the sense of space which is still present in the former icon."<sup>27</sup> The Virgin icon does not have the same level of highly developed lifelike expression of Christ Pantocrator, but the Virgin icon does have a strong complexity and richness in color. Weitzmann uses the dating and artistic techniques of the Virgin icon to provide the sixth century date for Christ Pantocrator.

The Saint Peter icon is heavily damaged from age; the lifelike bright eyes are intact and Saint Peter's facial pigment has a less realistic effect than his eyes. Saint Peter exhibits similarities to Christ Pantocrator, such as what Weitzmann describes as the same Greco-Roman brush technique, similar nimbi, and similar hair parts. Due to the sharp folds of Saint Peter's robe, the icon is dated as the

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<sup>27</sup> Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai*, 21.

last of the encaustic trio and compared to contemporary seventh century art.

Weitzmann, Chatzidakis, and Sotirious agree that it was likely painted in the late sixth century or early seventh century.<sup>28</sup>

The encaustic technique is usually associated with Egyptian funerary painting. Danielle Rice believes that Greek artists in Egypt crafted these encaustic paintings in the second and third centuries. Encaustic art created in Northern Africa received patronage from Christian emperors in Constantinople. In the sixth and seventh century, the practice of encaustic painting was practiced almost exclusively within the Byzantine Empire, having declined in Egypt.<sup>29</sup> This evidence supports Weitzmann's conclusion of the Sinai icon trio as highly developed artistry originating from the capital of the Byzantine Empire.

Weitzmann and those other scholars in agreement with him conclude that Christ Pantocrator originated in sixth century Constantinople. Kitzinger's dating diverges slightly, but is still generally of the same era. This sixth century date was determined after the thirteenth century addition was removed during a twentieth century restoration. The clear connection between Saint Catherine's and the Emperor Justinian provide an unmistakable connection with Constantinople. By analyzing the historical evidence that suggests similar Christ Pantocrator icons of the same era, Chatzidakis further concludes that not only was Christ Pantocrator commissioned in Constantinople, but the icon was

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<sup>28</sup> Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai*, 23-26

<sup>29</sup> Danielle Rice, "Encaustic Painting." In *The Dictionary of Art*, edited by Jane Turner (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1996), 197.

also part of a prominent imperially promoted style of icons. Weitzmann uses the remaining contemporary icons from Saint Catherine's to support his belief that Christ Pantocrator was the most artistically developed and theologically complex icon of its time.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Christological Controversies

Christ Pantocrator reflects the early Christian Church's developing concern about the nature of Jesus of Nazareth and what about him was Christ-like. Opinions regarding the nature of Jesus as Christ were not uniform across the Christian world. A series of councils were held between 325 A.D. and 843 A.D. to debate these differing Christological opinions as they arose. Christ Pantocrator portrays Jesus as the Christ and captures these dueling natures. Christ Pantocrator is a depiction of divine and human natures that are harmoniously balanced; portraying the harmony the councils strove for. At the same time, this painting is the embodiment of these controversies precisely because the face of Jesus is divided, portraying both the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ.

Timothy Gregory's *A History of Byzantium* outlines the historical development of the Byzantine Empire, and the theological controversies that plagued the Empire for centuries.<sup>30</sup> Gregory is the main source for the historical narrative provided in this chapter. Christoph Schöenborn, the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, is the main source used for understanding the theological

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<sup>30</sup> Timothy E. Gregory, *A History of Byzantium* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

arguments of early Christianity. Schöenborn's *God's Human Face: The Christ-Icon*, meticulously documents and analyzes the development of Christian theology from its origins.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Emerging Faith of the Followers of Jesus**

Debates over Jesus' divinity continued for centuries. When Jesus died, his remaining disciples were left with his teachings, and they struggled to hold together his followers. As early Christians, they sought to understand the significance of the life of Jesus and how to proceed as an emerging religious group. As the books of the New Testament were pieced together, forming the Gospels and epistles, there was a significant concern with the teachings of Jesus, conversion, and proper behavior of the early Christians.

The Gospels, comprised of the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are accounts of the life and teachings of the man Jesus of Nazareth.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are generally grouped together and called the Synoptic Gospels because they share a similar literary style and tell many similar events in the life of Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels chronicle the events of the life of Jesus and tend to portray him as an extraordinary man. These Gospels were written forty to sixty years after the death of Jesus.

The Gospel of John, which differs from the Synoptic Gospels, was written around 90 A.D., about sixty years after the death of Jesus. John

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<sup>31</sup> Christoph Schöenborn, *God's Human Face: The Christ-Icon* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).



begins with a clear and distinct view of Jesus as a divine being directly related to God as the Father. In the Gospel of John, the events of the life of Jesus differ from the Synoptic Gospels, and Jesus is portrayed not as a miracle worker or extraordinary rabbi, but rather as the Son of God, the Christ. The opening verses of John draw this clear connection of Jesus as The Word, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”<sup>32</sup> The Gospel of John also emphasizes Jesus as The Word becoming flesh and living in the world. Unlike the Synoptics, John provides the strongest conception of Jesus as the divine Christ.

As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, questions about the exact nature of this Christ figure arose that had not been answered by the Gospels. As time passed, the followers of Jesus elevated his status more and more. The earliest accounts of Jesus, the historical Synoptic Gospels, depict Jesus as man, yet over time his divine relationship to God as the Father became a more central facet of this religious figure. With the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul laying a strong foundation for the divinity of Jesus as the Christ, later Christians and the emerging Church were left to grapple with how to reconcile the human Jesus of the earlier Synoptic Gospels with the divine Christ from John and Paul.

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<sup>32</sup> John 1:1-2 (New Revised Standard Version).

## **The Natures of Jesus as Understood by the Early Christian Church**

The Emperor Constantine the Great in 330 A.D. relocated the administrative capital of the Roman Empire to the city of Byzantium, renamed Constantinople. Emperor Constantine was responsible for the wealth and glory within the new Byzantine Empire and for a more institutionalized element of Christianity. Constantine converted by baptism into Christianity on his deathbed in 337 A.D. He was the first emperor to declare himself a Christian and incorporated Christian elements in his political policy, such as using the Christian symbol *chi rho* in military battles. He recognized the growth of Christianity throughout the empire, a result of the toleration policies established in 311 A.D. by the earlier Emperor Galerius who ruled from 305 A.D. to 311 A.D.

As a part of this early period of Christianity, emerging leaders, or bishops throughout the empire were struggling to determine a correct, or “orthodox,” form of Christianity. Those that were ultimately considered to be false in their belief were called “heretics.” The word “heresy” means “choice” or freedom of thought. Prior to 313 A.D., there was no official position within the Christian Church on differences of thought among those baptized into Christianity. Before his official baptism, Constantine was responsible for leading the disputing bishops and the Christians of the empire to establish the right “orthodox” path of faith.

The disputing bishops disagreed over Donatism, a group that followed the bishop Donatus in Carthage, Egypt. Donatus did not want to reinstate and welcome the bishops and monks who had renounced their faith previously under persecution back into the church. The Donatists, were ultimately seen as “heretics,” as a result of their refusal to welcome the priests and bishops back into the church. The Donatists were in opposition to the “orthodox” belief that the church had the power to forgive sins and welcome back all believers. Constantine summoned two church councils to settle the dispute in 313 A.D. and 314 A.D. The council of 314 A.D. ruled in favor of Caecilian’s “orthodox” belief. The heretical Donatists were persecuted in the non-African part of the Byzantine Roman Empire, although they ultimately remained strong in Northern Africa and split away from the main Christian church.

Almost immediately following the Donatism controversy, another Christian debate occurred in Alexandria, Egypt. The priest Arius disagreed with the prevailing beliefs, instead arguing for emphasis on the humanity of Jesus as Christ in clear distinction from the divinity of God as the Father. Arius taught that Jesus as Christ, the Son, was not equal to God, the Father, and did not fully have the same godly status. He thought that Christ became eternal, but prior to his time on earth, was not eternal and in this way, Jesus was not equal to God. Arius’ primary goal was to emphasize and preserve the fundamental Christian belief in a monotheistic God. Arius saw the

Father as the primary divine figure and did not believe that Jesus was neither equal to God; nor was he a physical image or incarnation of God.

Constantine's desire to standardize orthodox beliefs was seen in his attempts to end the Arian debate by calling upon the disagreeing bishops to meet peacefully and come up with a compromise, which ultimately proved futile. Constantine then called a council of the bishops in the empire, which covered what they then considered the universe, or civilized world. The universal nature of the council warranted the name *oikoumene* (ecumenical), meaning universal. This was the first empire-wide council to discuss Christian theology.

The first ecumenical council, held at Nicaea in 325 A.D., condemned the teaching of Arius through the creation of the Nicene Creed. The Creed stated "Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."<sup>33</sup> The Father and Son were declared to be equally God and, therefore, divine and existed together for all time. The Arians did not accept the Nicene Creed, maintaining that they were, indeed, actually the orthodox Christians. The Nicene Creed became one of the earliest and most fundamental foundations of Christian statements of faith. The Creed equates the divine substance of

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<sup>33</sup> Henry R. Percival, ed. *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church, Their Canons and Dogmatic Decrees, Together with the Canons of all the Local Synods which have received Ecumenical Acceptance*. Vol. 14, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second series, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 3.

Jesus as the Christ with the same divinity of God the Father. It determined that Christianity was monotheistic, and that a singular God existed as God the Father and God the Son. Christians were able to articulate their belief that Jesus was human with a divine nature.

Christ Pantocrator was painted several centuries after the Nicene council, yet it illustrates the issue that prompted the council. Captured within the painting are both the divine and human elements of Jesus as Christ, each in clear distinction, demonstrating the complexity of Jesus as the Christ figure. Christ Pantocrator seeks to provide the harmony and unity of the two natures according to the conclusion of the Council of Nicaea.

Despite the Nicene Council, questions regarding the relationship between the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ still arose. The use of images in Christianity was not widespread early on, but after the conversion of Constantine, the practice became increasingly popular. The initial hesitancy toward the use of images is illustrated in a letter from the bishop Eusebius of Caesarea to Constantine's sister as a response to her request for an image of Christ.

What sort of image of Christ are you seeking? Is it the true and unalterable one which bears His essential characteristics, or the one which He took up for our sake when He assumed the form of a servant . . . Surely then, you are seeking His image as a servant, that of the flesh which He put on for our sake. But that, too, we have been taught, was mingled with the glory of His divinity so that the mortal part was swallowed up by Life.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire: 312-1453* (Engelwood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), 16-17.

Eusebius admits that the two forms of Jesus as Christ, as human and as a divine being, were not in a harmonious unity. Eusebius then continues to develop a theology on behalf of the Church to emphasize the divinity of Jesus as Christ. He believes that the humanity of Jesus as Christ was swallowed by his divinity, and it is impossible to even begin to attempt to depict the brilliance and magnificence of the divine Jesus as Christ in an image. By allowing the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth to be consumed and overtaken by the divinity of Jesus as Christ, the human elements of the man are completely lost.

After the death of Constantine, his sons who ruled after him were all raised as Christians and understood the importance of their religious convictions as inherent to their duties as rulers. As rulers with strong Christian beliefs, the sons of Constantine firmly cemented Christianity as the predominant religion within the Roman Empire. Two of the sons were orthodox, and the third was a supporter of Arianism. The support for Arianism continued to be strong, especially in Anatolia and Egypt.

The fourth century bishop Athanasius of Alexandria ultimately defeated Arianism at the Council of Nicea. Athanasius argued that God is always the Father, and Jesus as Christ is eternally the Son. He believed that the Son is the image of the Father. Therefore, the essence of the Father can be accessed through the Son. If the Son is in the Father, then the Father must also be in the Son. The Son is then the *consubstantial image* of the Father.

The Son is described as consubstantial, meaning made of the same divine substance as the Father, and is the incarnate image equal to the Father. Following this argument, God's perfect εἰκονα (icon or image) of Himself is in his Son. A worshipper can access the Father through worshiping the Son, as he is the embodiment of God the Father. Athanasius' argument became the accepted official Church position. It is through this early fundamental argument that later Christians found the justification for their religious art.

In the mid-fourth century, the strength of Christian thinkers grew, including a group of Christian theologians known as the Cappadocian Fathers. One of the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 until 394) developed strong anti-Arian beliefs. Gregory was a bishop who wished to clearly define the distinction between *ousia* (essence) and *hypostasis* (person). He uses *hypostasis* to distinguish that which makes a person an individual and separates them from other people. *Ousia* is a general essence that does not refer to a specific individual. By separating essence from person, Gregory struggled to understand how the divine Christ and the man Jesus of Nazareth could be in union as decreed by the Nicæan council. Gregory's attempt to create a theology to understand the inherently different properties of Jesus as Christ demonstrates that Christian thinkers were attempting to support the Nicene Creed while recognizing the separate features of Jesus as Christ.

Significant also is that Gregory draws from Hebrews to illustrate that “He [Jesus as Christ] is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being.”<sup>35</sup> Gregory uses the worship of God through icons as the foundation of Christianity by arguing that Jesus as Christ is the icon, that is, the image of the Father:

For the concept of “image” could not be sustained at all if it would not imply imprinted and unchangeable characteristics. He who contemplates the beauty of the image will also arrive at the knowledge of the original. And he who has seen, as it were, the form of the Son in the Spirit, has also grasped the imprint of the Person of the Father: we see, after a fashion, the one in the other.<sup>36</sup>

Schönborn interprets Gregory’s argument to mean that “The beauty of the Son is also the beauty of the Father: it is only the beauty of God.”<sup>37</sup> Gregory’s statement regarding the beauty of God uses imagery to understand the monotheistic conception of the Holy Trinity. Although Christ Pantocrator is a later depiction of Jesus as Christ, according to Gregory’s line of thought, by viewing Jesus as the Son, in the form of Christ Pantocrator, one can contemplate the beauty of the Father through him. In doing this, one can contemplate his divergent natures, which are both portrayed in the Christ Pantocrator icon.

The Byzantine Emperor Theodosios ruled from 379 A.D. to 395 A.D., and wanted to end the lingering support of Arianism. In 380 A.D., Theodosios issued a law declaring that all Christians should follow the

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<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 1:3 (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>36</sup> Schönborn, *God’s Human Face*, 30.

<sup>37</sup> Schönborn, *God’s Human Face*, 30.



orthodox beliefs of the Roman and Alexandrian bishops. In order to ensure that Arianism was eradicated entirely, Theodosios called the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381 A.D. The Second Ecumenical Council, also known as the First Council of Constantinople, re-affirmed the Nicene Creed. Arianism was largely ended in the East Roman Empire, although it spread rapidly in the West among the Germanic non-Romans, considered barbarians by the Byzantines. By 392 A.D., Theodosios forbid all public and private pagan practice, solidifying the prominent role of Christianity throughout the empire.

The next great theological controversy regarding the natures of Jesus as Christ after Arianism was the Nestorian controversy, which constituted another Empire-wide debate. The controversy arose after Theodosios II appointed Nestorios as bishop, or patriarch of Constantinople in 428 A.D. Nestorios objected to the commonly used word *Theotokos* (literally “God-bearer”) for the Virgin Mary. He preferred *Christotokos* (“Christ-bearer”), arguing that God himself could not be born of a human being. Those in opposition to Nestorios, of which there were many, thought that he was creating two Christs, one fully human and the other fully divine.

Theodosios agreed to call an ecumenical council at Ephesos in 431 A.D. The council, led by Cyril of Alexandria, quickly condemned Nestorios’ separation of the humanity and divinity in Jesus as Christ. Nestorios was exiled, but he received popular support in Syria, Persia, and Arabia. Today

Nestorian Christianity exists as the Assyrian Orthodox Church based out of Syria, but with many members living throughout the Middle East.

By separating the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ, Nestorianism was able to emphasize the unique and distinct natures of Jesus as Christ. These distinct natures are clearly defined and visible within the Sinai Christ Pantocrator. Although the Nestorian controversy was about one hundred years prior to the painting of Christ Pantocrator, the two Christs that Nestorios supposedly promoted are visible in the icon. Nestoriansim was condemned within the Byzantine Empire, but perhaps a lingering Nestorian influence was present within Constantinople in the sixth century, which might have influenced the painter of Christ Pantocrator.

A fifth century movement called Monophysitism emerged in response to the Nestorian movement. The Monophysites developed a new perception of the natures of Jesus as Christ, believing that one could trump the other. Led by a monk named Eutyches, Monophysites believed that if the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ were not separate, as stated at the council at Ephesos in 431 A.D., then his humanity was overcome by his divinity. The Monophysites believed that his humanity was absorbed leaving him with a single (*mono*) nature (*pysis*). In 449 A.D. a council was held at Ephesos, called the Second Council of Ephesos, or the Robber Council, because it ended in violence. The Second Council of Ephesos supported Eutyches' Monophysite teachings which emphasized Jesus as Christ's divinity.

The Fourth Ecumenical Council, at Chalcedon in 451 A.D. looked into the decision of the Second Council of Ephesos. The Roman patriarch, or Pope, Leo I sent papal legates to ensure that his anti-monophysite position prevailed. The council determined that Jesus as Christ had two natures, divine and human that are *united without division or separation and are distinct in their union together*. A letter by Cyril to John of Antioch articulates the newly determined natures of Jesus as Christ as “of the same substance with his Father according to his Divinity, and of the same substance with us according to his humanity; for there became a union of two natures.”<sup>38</sup> As a result of the Council of Chalcedon, the Monophysites broke away from the Greek Orthodox Church to form the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria in Egypt.

The union of the two substances is described as a “hypostatic-union,” which is from the Greek *hypostasis* (person) meaning a union of persons. This term allows for the presence of both the divine and human natures of Jesus as Christ. Christ Pantocrator is an exact depiction of how the Chalcedon council determined the natures of Jesus as Christ to exist. Christ Pantocrator depicts Jesus as Christ exactly as the Church conceived him at the time of the Council of Chalcedon. This further supports the earlier suggestion that Christ Pantocrator was an officially promoted image of that specific era. By allowing both natures of Jesus as Christ to be recognized,

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<sup>38</sup> Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 251.

the Council of Chalcedon laid the foundation for the greatest controversy of the Byzantine Empire, known as iconoclasm.

### **Iconoclasm**

Following previous Ecumenical Councils, which debated Christology, the final Ecumenical Council, which was universally recognized in 843 A.D., concluded the greatest debate of the Byzantine Empire. This debate over iconoclasm, which tore the Byzantine Empire apart, ran from 730 A.D. to 843 A.D. During the iconoclastic period, the majority of religious images were systematically destroyed. In response to the iconoclasts, which are those that ‘break’ or destroy images, the iconodules, also known as iconophiles, which are those that respect and venerate icons and images, formulated a highly developed theology in favor of the veneration of icons, which are examined in this chapter.

### **A History of Iconoclasm**

In 730 A.D., Emperor Leo III introduced iconoclasm in an attempt to end what he saw as idolatry, which was forbidden in the Mosaic laws of the Old Testament. He declared the worship and public display of icons illegal, and systematically removed images of divine figures from churches and other places. According to legend, Leo used an axe to hack away the imposing prototype for the Sinai Christ Pantocrator icon, which hung on the Chalke

Gate.<sup>39</sup> Increasing contact with expansionist Islamic and Jewish iconoclastic perspectives both within and increasingly surrounding the Byzantine Empire encouraged an iconoclastic atmosphere throughout Byzantium. Gregory suggests that Leo's strong personality could have caused him to forbid icons purely on the basis that the worship of icons replaced the emperor as God's representative on earth. Due to the divine aspect of icons, Leo may have feared that icons would overshadow the cult of emperor worship.<sup>40</sup>

Emperor Constantine V, Leo's son, called a church council in 745 A.D. at Hieria, on the shores of the Bosphorus Strait, outside of Constantinople. The Council of Hieria declared iconoclasm to be the true, correct, and orthodox belief, and iconophiles were actively persecuted. Although iconoclasm had destroyed the majority of Christian imagery in the Byzantine Empire, the iconophile support of icons persisted. As the politics of the empire changed, the imperial position towards icons changed with it. The Empress Irene reversed iconoclasm at an Ecumenical Council in 787 A.D., the second to be held at Nicaea. Iconoclasm was reinstated under the rule of the military general Leo V at a council in Constantinople in 815 A.D., which reaffirmed the Iconoclastic Council of Hieria of 745 A.D. The second period of iconoclasm ended in 843 A.D. by Theodora, the regent for her young son Michael III. Theodora called

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<sup>39</sup> The Chalke Gate was the primary entrance to the imperial palace of Constantinople, where the government of the empire was administered.

<sup>40</sup> Gregory, *A History of Byzantium*, 190-194.

together iconophile officials and reaffirmed the Second Council of Nicaea. The recognition of the Council of 787 A.D. became known as the Sunday of Orthodoxy because it was the day that finally ended iconoclasm, which is also referred to as the Triumph of Orthodoxy.

### **The Theology of an Icon**

The use of icons grew rapidly in the latter half of the sixth century, because political and religious leaders used icons as a declaration of their increasing power as the representative of God's earthly kingdom. The Quinisext Council of 692 A.D. in Constantinople declared that symbolic depictions of Jesus as Christ were not to be utilized, but that images promoting his human likeness should be cultivated. The elimination of the divine nature of Jesus as Christ, and the emphasis of his humanity in physical depictions portray Jesus of Nazareth the man. By depicting only his human aspect, the idolatrous act of depicting a divine being was avoided. The Council concluded that only images of the humanity of Jesus as Christ should be created, stating:

We command that from now on in the icons there should be painted, in place of the former lamb, the human likeness [*charaktêra*]<sup>41</sup> of Christ our God, the Lamb who takes upon himself the sins of the world. For thus we will comprehend the depth of humility in the Word of God, and will be prompted to remember his life in the flesh, his suffering, his salvific death, and the resulting salvation of the world.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The Greek term *charaktêra* has taken two meanings: "icon" and "likeness depicted on the icon."

<sup>42</sup> Schönborn, *God's Human Face*, 185.

As a result of the Quinisext Council, Justinian II redesigned the imperial coin, or solidus, to have the emperor's face on the front, and Jesus as Christ, usually in Pantocrator form, on the reverse. The Christ Pantocrator of Sinai may have inspired Justinian's solidus. Byzantine Christians viewed their empire as an imperfect reflection of the Kingdom of Heaven. Accordingly, Byzantines considered the emperor as the earthly, imperfect, human replicate of God. A coin with a Christ Pantocrator image and a portrait of the emperor re-enforced the connection the Byzantines saw between their religion and society.

Prior to iconoclasm, icons were used widely within the home, as well as in public places such as cathedrals and imperial buildings. By worshiping an icon, specifically an icon of Jesus as Christ within the home, the prayer was offered directly to Jesus as Christ. Byzantines saw Jesus as Christ in the icon, that is, the prototype, or original in the image. Through the icon, a worshiper found a direct connection with the divine and believed that these icons were also able to "act" on behalf of Jesus as Christ and aide the worshiper.

The Patriarch under Leo, Germanus was the Patriarch of Constantinople from 715 A.D. to 730 A.D. Germanus was an iconophile and one of the earliest to defend images during the time preceding iconoclasm. He argued that "He who rejects the icon, also rejects the Incarnation [the Son]" and that Jesus as Christ brought the true knowledge of God, freeing Christians from the error of

idolatry.<sup>43</sup> He argued that the icons depicted Jesus as Christ in his human form, which is the likeness of his holy form, and that these icons were honored and worshiped appropriately. Schönborn goes on to quote Germanus:

He [Jesus as Christ] took on our own flesh and blood, one like us yet without sin, as the great Apostle says (Heb 4:15). For this reason we depict his human likeness in an image, the way he looked as man and in the flesh, and not as he is in his ineffable and invisible divinity . . . We depict the likeness [*charaktêra*] of his holy flesh in our icons, which we esteem and honor through appropriate reverence, for they remind us of his life-giving and ineffable Incarnation.<sup>44</sup>

By splitting the human and divine natures of Jesus as Christ, Germanus preached an iconophile message in opposition to the unity declared at the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon. Germanus' opinion was highly problematic under the iconoclastic rule of Leo, and Germanus ultimately resigned rather than preach iconoclasm.

Under Constantine V the focus of iconoclasm shifted to a discussion of the nature of the icons; iconoclasts argued that it was unacceptable to depict the human form of Jesus as Christ, since it separated his human form from his divine form. Because the two natures are united, the icon itself was an image of the divine.

In response to the iconoclasm declared at Hiera, an orthodox monk, John of Damascene, developed a strong theology in defense of icons. John lived in Syria, which was outside of the Byzantine Empire and not subject to

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<sup>43</sup> Schönborn, *God's Human Face*, 181.

<sup>44</sup> Schönborn, *God's Human Face*, 181.



iconoclasm. In order to understand the veneration of images, John began with an apologia, or defense, of images. He created a definition of images, arguing, “An image is a likeness expressing [*charaktêrizon*] an original, yet being distinct from it in certain respects.”<sup>45</sup>

The strongest defense of the iconoclastic position was the Mosaic commandment not to venerate idols made of human hands. John of Damascus developed the earliest argument in favor of the worship of material objects made of human hands. He contended that he does not worship matter, but rather the creator of matter. He honors and venerates matter, because it is an aid in his salvation and endowed with divine power and grace. John raised the issue that other objects, such as the wood, gold or silver of a cross or chalice are also made of matter. He drew attention to holy sites such as the Mountain Cavalry, or the tomb of Jesus as physical places also made of matter. Also included in this categorization of holy objects were relics that were also popular objects of devotion. John demanded that veneration and worship of all things made of matter end if the iconoclasts would not allow the veneration of images made of matter. He argued that objects made of matter are indeed with honor, declaring that “I do not worship matter, I only worship the Creator of matter, him who for my sake became matter himself, and took it upon himself to dwell in matter, and who by means of matter brought about my salvation. For nothing that comes

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<sup>45</sup> Schönborn, *God's Human Face*, 195.

from God is without honor.”<sup>46</sup> Additionally, John reiterated the opinion put forth by the Patriarch Germanus, that because God has taken on a human form, the image of that form could now be depicted.

The Council of 787 A.D. declared that icons could be venerated, and by doing so, the worshiper remembered the original, and did not worship the icons as one would worship Jesus as the Christ or God as the Father. The council made a clear distinction between the action of honorable reverence (*proskynesis*), and the true worship of faith (*latreia*). Honorable reverence (*proskynesis*), is given to icons, images, and other objects made of matter. The true worship of faith is given alone to the divine.<sup>47</sup>

The theological discourse from the iconoclastic period concluded a definitive position of the Byzantine Church’s position on icons. By exhaustively examining the essence and natures of Jesus as Christ, the Church determined how to depict his image on an icon. The Church declared that icons could be venerated, while the true worship was given not to the icon but to its prototype. Christ Pantocrator was fashioned prior to iconoclasm, and should have been destroyed; yet it survived the destruction of icons because Saint Catherine’s monastery was outside of the Byzantine Empire. Christ Pantocrator was painted before the theological discourse of iconoclasm, and represents the theological understanding of Jesus as Christ prior to iconoclasm. The continuing

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<sup>46</sup> Schönborn, *God’s Human Face*, 195.

<sup>47</sup> Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, 550.

controversies of the highly complex issues of the centuries of Ecumenical Councils are echoed in the Christ Pantocrator icon. By showing a clear distinction between the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ, Christ Pantocrator illustrates Jesus as Christ exactly as the final official Church position declared he should be depicted. The problem was, as we shall see in chapter three, most later icons do not follow the form of Christ Pantocrator, but rather depict a Jesus as Christ that is not a hypostatic union. Instead most later icons show the divine figure depicted as wholly divine and lacking any human dimensionality as seen by the golden faces lacking expressions of human realism.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Later Christ Pantocrator Images**

Due to the standardization of the method of veneration of icons, and the settling of theological arguments in 843 A.D, by the Seventh Ecumenical Council, the discussion over the depiction of the human and divine natures of Jesus as Christ was settled by official declaration. The official Church position stated that icons portray the visible nature of Jesus as Christ, which is his perfect humanity that exists in harmony with his divinity. According to the decisions concluded by the earlier councils, the depictions of Jesus as Christ, specifically in the form of a Christ Pantocrator, after iconoclasm should balance the human and divine natures of Jesus as Christ. The majority of post-iconoclastic Byzantine art does not incorporate the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. Rather, these images allow the divinity of Jesus as Christ to dominate, eliminating the expressive humanistic elements seen in the Sinai Christ Pantocrator.

A monastery at Daphni and a monastery in Boeotia, known as Hosios Lukas (Saint Luke), each contain mosaics of Christ Pantocrator that date to the eleventh century. These Christ Pantocrator mosaics both appear more like the Sinai Christ Pantocrator in their embodiment of the divided natures of Jesus as

Christ. These later representations show that despite the decisions of these many councils, the relationship between the natures of Jesus as Christ depicted in icons remained unclear. The Christ Pantocrators of Daphni and Hosios Lukas are an attempt to portray both the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ in a manner that accurately reflects the conclusions of the Ecumenical Councils. The mosaics both attempt to incorporate both natures in alternative ways, distinct from the contemporary icons that portrayed only the divinity of Jesus as Christ.

Ernst Diez and Otto Demus published a comprehensive study, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece: Hosios Lukas and Daphni* in 1931, and are considered the earliest and most authoritative on these monasteries.<sup>48</sup> Their book catalogues and analyzes the mosaics and paintings inside the monasteries. The recent publication by Chris Hellier, *Monasteries of Greece*, updates and supports Diez and Demus' approach to the study of the Hosios Lukas and Daphni monasteries.<sup>49</sup>

### **Hosios Lukas and Daphni**

After iconoclasm ended, the Byzantine Empire entered a period known as the Macedonian Renaissance under the rule of a family of Macedonian emperors, lasting from roughly 842 A.D. to 1071 A.D. Artwork from the Macedonian period typically embodies an increasing trend to recreate the highly developed

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<sup>48</sup> Ernst Diez and Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece: Hosios Lukas and Daphni* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931).

<sup>49</sup> Chris Hellier, *Monasteries of Greece* (London: Parke Books, 1996).

artistry characterized by the Hellenistic influence prior to iconoclasm.<sup>50</sup> This turn toward the style of Greek antiquity served as a strong undertone in the emerging style of monastic painting.

In the eleventh century, a school of monastic painting emerged. This school of art was quite distinct from the artwork produced in the Byzantine capital city Constantinople which had embodied the highly developed artistry of the Macedonian Renaissance. The mosaic panels that tell the story of Jesus in the monasteries of this era capture the elements of the monastic style, expressing simplistic forms and earthen colors with little detail. The monasteries of Hosios Lukas and Daphni are the finest examples of these mosaic story panels. These mosaic story panels are separate and distinct from the Christ Pantocrator mosaics in their level of artistry and artistic influence. The story panel mosaics focus on representing the story of Jesus rather than the detailed artistry as seen in the icon of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator. Gervase Mathew wrote of this monastic style, “It is at times crudely emotional; it has its own rhythms; by the decision to emphasize the dramatic and by the successful intention to tell a clear story clearly.”<sup>51</sup>

Hosios Lukas and the Daphni monasteries are the two most prominent monasteries from the tenth and eleventh centuries; both are located in mainland Greece and are in relative proximity to Athens. Although there is no direct connection to their pagan foundations, both monasteries are near classical pre-

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<sup>50</sup> Gervase Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), 122.

<sup>51</sup> Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, 142.

Christian holy sites; Hosios Lukas is near the temple of Delphi devoted to Apollo, and Daphni is near the temple of Demeter at Eleusis. Daphni is a small church, bathed in light, while Hosios Lukas is a large church composed of many galleries and is situated above the tomb of its founder, Saint Luke.<sup>52</sup> Hosios Lukas and Daphni are designed to follow a standard format of medieval Byzantine churches of a cross-in-square layout design. The interior decoration scheme employs a Christ Pantocrator painted mosaic tiled into the dome of each church with portraits of the prophets in the drum below. The Virgin Mary and, occasionally, angels are typically found in the conch of the apse. The Gospel narrative of the life of Jesus is told on mosaic panels in the upper naos. In the galleries and on the walls near the ground, there are depictions of miracle-working saints associated with the monastery or the region.

### **The Panel Mosaics of Hosios Lukas and Daphni**

The vibrant mosaic story panels depicting the Gospel narrative often eclipse in fame the painted mosaics of Christ Pantocrator at Hosios Lukas and Daphni. These story panel mosaics give the monasteries their recognition and must be considered as the background for the Christ Pantocrator mosaics within the church.

Although the craftsmen of Hosios Lukas are not known, the images depicted in the Gospel narrative mosaic panels are of a simple design. The shapes are

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<sup>52</sup> André Grabar, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire Byzantine Art in the Middle Ages* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1963), 112.

simple, the proportions squat, and the highly developed style of the tenth century Macedonian Renaissance are absent.<sup>53</sup> Diez and Demus describe the style of the Gospel mosaic panels as an Oriental style, with less focus on the realistic elements and a simple monastic style.<sup>54</sup> The Daphni mosaic cycle is more sophisticated, and Hellier argues that they incorporate the work of at least one mosaicist from Constantinople.<sup>55</sup> Demus describes the panel mosaics as a combination of the Oriental and Hellenistic styles, attributing multiple craftsmen at Daphni.<sup>56</sup>

The Christ Pantocrator mosaics of Daphni and Hosios Lukas are distinctly different from their accompanying Gospel panel mosaics. The mosaic panels appear to incorporate artistic styles not present in the Christ Pantocrator mosaics, which suggest that the Christ Pantocrator mosaics were complete by a separate artist. Each Christ Pantocrator mosaic shows an attempt to re-examine the possible ways to incorporate the human and divine natures of Jesus as Christ into a single image that can also call upon the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

### **The Christ Pantocrator of Hosios Lukas**

There are two Christ Pantocrator images at Hosios Lukas. The Christ Pantocrator within Hosios Lukas that is of particular importance is located in the

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<sup>53</sup> Grabar, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 123.

<sup>54</sup> Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece*, 76-81.

<sup>55</sup> Hellier, *Monasteries of Greece*, 72.

<sup>56</sup> Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece*, 76.



narthex, above the Royal Door, which is the entrance to the nave, or primary sanctuary area. Due to the collapse and ruin of the original dome, the second Christ Pantocrator in the dome of the church is a later addition. The narthex Christ Pantocrator is dressed in a rich royal blue mantle draped over a deep golden brown clavi. His right hand is positioned in a blessing gesture, and in his left is an open Gospel. This Christ Pantocrator has brown hair parted slightly on the left, a moustache and beard parted and swept to the right. The left eyebrow is arched, forming three distinct sections, unlike the right eyebrow, which follows the arch of the eyelid almost uniformly. The shading under the left eyebrow is darker as is the entire left side of the face. The shadows on the left side of the face imply a light source from the upper right of the mosaic. Christ Pantocrator's eyes are distinctly different; they are not on the same horizontal axis and the left eye is darker and appears to be looking into the distance to the left. Demus describes the high level of artistry exhibited in the Christ Pantocrator mosaic as, "craftsmen[ship] led by a surpassingly capable painter . . . His manner of modeling, soft and at the same time vigorous, has not been equaled by his disciples or successors."<sup>57</sup>

The positioning of Christ Pantocrator and his darker left side implies a close connection with the Christ Pantocrator at Sinai. Weitzmann draws a connection between these two Christ Pantocrators, suggesting that the Hosios Lukas Christ

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<sup>57</sup> Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece*, 92.

Pantocrator is a copy of the Sinai original.<sup>58</sup> The Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator is a near copy of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator in terms of physical positioning and facial expressions. The evidence that Demus has found, which attributes the craftsman of the narthex to be a distinctly different mosaicist from the monastic craftsmen of the Gospel mosaic cycle, further supports Weitzmann's claim. Because the mosaicist of the narthex is distinct, everything that is known about the panel mosaic cycles can be disregarded in connection with the Christ Pantocrator.

Unlike the mosaic panels, the Christ Pantocrator is not in the same simple, provincial, Oriental style of the mosaic cycle, and can be studied as its own unique entity allowing the motives of the mosaicist to be speculated. The mosaicist was possibly captivated by the elegant harmony between the facial distinction of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator and incorporated this division into the Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator. The councils that debated the division of the humanity and divinity of Jesus as Christ did not adequately balance these two natures in a manner that artists were able to readily depict. The Hosios Lukas mosaicist recognized an opportunity to reflect both natures of Jesus as Christ according to the resolution of the councils. Additionally, the artist must have been exposed to the Sinai Christ Pantocrator, or at the very least, been strongly influenced by the neo-Hellenism of the Macedonian Renaissance to have created the Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator.

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<sup>58</sup> Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai*, 13-15.

The trouble with this argument is that Saint Catherine's monastery in the Sinai Mountains of Egypt was no longer part of the Byzantine Empire in the tenth century. However, this does not mean the influence of Saint Catherine's had diminished, the monastery remained a popular destination for pilgrims. The pilgrims likely returned to the Byzantine Empire, and having seen a depiction of the dueling natures of Jesus as Christ, posited Christ Pantocrator as a possible answer to the question of how to portray a balance of the natures that the mosaicist picked up on and depicted in the Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator.

While it is impossible to know for sure what inspired the Hosios Lukas craftsman, perhaps he had a personal motivation. The end of iconoclasm and the final Ecumenical Council had declared and defined orthodoxy, permitted icons, and ended all Church discussion of the divine and human natures of Jesus as Christ. The need for balance and harmony between these dueling natures was determined and needed no further discussion according to the orthodoxy proclaimed at the final council. Yet this Christ Pantocrator of Hosios Lukas has features indicative of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator, suggesting that, at least to the individual craftsman of the narthex, the debate between the natures of Jesus as Christ were in fact not adequately settled with the end of iconoclasm. The Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator falls short of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator because while the distinction between each nature is present in the face, the Hosios Lukas lacks the same expressive realism of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator.

### **The Daphni Christ Pantocrator**

The Christ Pantocrator of Daphni goes beyond attempting to find a balance between the human and divine natures of Jesus as Christ; the Daphni Christ Pantocrator is taken over entirely by a dark, humanistic element. This Christ Pantocrator is not the kind Jesus of Western Christianity, but rather a dark, awesome figure inspiring fear and discomfort in the viewer, indicative of the God of the Old Testament.<sup>59</sup>

Portraits of sixteen prophets surround the Daphni Christ Pantocrator, in the dome of the church. Christ Pantocrator is depicted in the traditional form, with parted brown hair and a parted moustache and beard. He wears a deep royal blue mantle, and like the Sinai Christ Pantocrator, a strip of the golden clavus, highlighted by red and black stones, peeks out from underneath the blue mantle. Focus is drawn to his hands that are positioned awkwardly and dominate the lower half of the painting. The right hand curls with the thumb and middle finger meeting to form the blessing gesture. His left hand grips a closed bejeweled Gospel; the elongated fingers appear as if they could be arthritic, suggesting that Christ Pantocrator may be old and failing, or have over-worked his hands. The face of this Christ Pantocrator is deeply frowning, with a stern closed mouth, implying that he may be displeased or angry. There are dark shadows on the left cheek, and pronounced bags under both eyes. The eyes are dark, and both look to the left, and seem to express fear or concern. The

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<sup>59</sup> Rice, *Art of the Byzantine Era*, 89-90.

eyebrows are dark and deeply arched, which in combination with the eyes give Christ Pantocrator an expression of anger, suspicion, or hostility.

Most striking in the Christ Pantocrator mosaic are the strong lines, which are employed to create a high level of detail, particularly on the forehead, nose, neck and hands. Due to the use of these lines, the detail is expressed, but is presented as a rudimentary attempt to express a high level of artistry. Demus believes that the lines of the forehead, which he describes as saddle-shaped, form a horizontal axis, which intersects with the prominent vertical axis of the nose, to create what he sees as the supremely symbolic cross.<sup>60</sup> Although Demus sees the linear shapes in Christ Pantocrator's forehead as a symbolic cross, the lines appear to me to be an attempt to use a deeply furrowed brow, to imply unhappiness or anger.

The strong lines, which fail to express fine detail, are not in the vein of neo-Hellenistic artistry of the contemporary Macedonian Renaissance. Rather, the Daphni Christ Pantocrator largely lacks the fine sophistication of the Hellenistic style, and instead captures the finest artisanship of the Oriental style. The linear design employed in the forehead, neck and hands are considered to be one of the finest examples within the Oriental artistic tradition. Demus describes his high opinion of the Christ Pantocrator mosaic as "this Oriental creation, which is the most impressive of the whole cycle [in comparison along with the Gospel panels], proves that Christian spirituality could never have been adequately

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<sup>60</sup> Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece*, 32.

expressed by Greek art alone.’<sup>61</sup> Here Demus refutes the often-held notion that classical Greek design is the superior mode of artistry.

While the expression of the Daphni Christ Pantocrator portrays strong emotions, these emotions are not in the same fine artistic style of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator. Although the consensus among scholars is that the Daphni Christ Pantocrator is alone in its greatness and austerity, the highly developed artistry of humanistic expressionism seen in the Sinai Christ Pantocrator is not present. Additionally, the Daphni Christ Pantocrator does not have the clear division down the center of his face. The divine and human aspects are not distinct, instead the human element has taken over the entire body of Christ Pantocrator.

I argue that the suspicious eyes show a stern or even angry Christ Pantocrator, and the gnarly hands curling around the Gospel book are hardly qualities of the ethereal and beautiful appearance associated with divinity. The only element in the mosaic that invokes the spirit of divinity is the symbolic positioning that provides the title Christ Pantocrator, such as the parted hair and beard, the blessing gesture, Gospel, and nimbus. The standard Christ Pantocrator elements provide the divinity necessary to even consider the man depicted as anything more than a dark and severe human. A facial division is not necessary to express the dueling natures of Jesus as Christ; the man himself is at odds against his background and physical positioning. The viewer is left to

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<sup>61</sup> Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece*, 79.

discern what may have caused Christ Pantocrator to be so suspicious or hostile, elements which can call into question the true nature of Christianity.

The Oriental Daphni Christ Pantocrator is entirely unlike the accompanying Hellenistic panel Gospel mosaics. It is generally accepted that the mosaicist of the Christ Pantocrator was a separate, distinct craftsman. The Daphni Christ Pantocrator is also dated to roughly a century after the Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator. As the monasteries of Hosios Lukas and Daphni are so often linked together, it is possible that the mosaicist of Daphni was exposed to the artwork at Hosios Lukas. Even if the Daphni mosaicist did not draw on the human elements of Hosios Lukas, the dark, human emotion of the Daphni Christ Pantocrator can be taken as yet another craftsman responding to the lack of adequate iconic representation of the resolution from the ecumenical councils. The Daphni Christ Pantocrator provides another understanding of how the two natures of Jesus as Christ can be depicted as existing with one another.

### **A Synthesis of all Christ Pantocrator Images**

While the highly developed style of expressive realism seen in the Sinai Christ Pantocrator was never reproduced, the Christ Pantocrators of Hosios Lukas and Daphni are legitimate attempts to grapple with the task of depicting Jesus as Christ in accordance with the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. The Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator is likely a copy of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator, attempting to recreate the harmonious balance between the

two natures of Jesus as Christ as seen in the Sinai Christ Pantocrator. The Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator comes up short by falling into the post-iconoclasm standard of allowing the divine elements to consume the human nature. The elimination of the humanity causes the Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator to lack the same holistic unity between the humanist realism of Jesus as Christ and the divine frame of the Christ Pantocrator positioning.

Interestingly, the Daphni Christ Pantocrator depicts the opposite elements of the Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator. The Daphni Christ Pantocrator does not have the facial distinction between the divine and human natures, but does incorporate the divine structural frame of the Christ Pantocrator positioning. The divine Christ Pantocrator positioning creates structural balance to enclose the dark human expression of the face.

The inability of the Hosios Lukas and Daphni Christ Pantocrators to recreate the holistic balance between the divine and human elements demonstrates the struggle but ultimate failure of the Church to accurately depict the resolution of the Christological controversies in the elegant style of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator. Perhaps the Sinai Christ Pantocrator was never successfully copied because it lay too far outside of the Byzantine Empire to have significant influence. Later icons seem to only promote the divinity of Jesus as Christ, even though such a depiction is in fact in opposition to the ultimate decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.



## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

As previous chapters of this study have explored, the Christ Pantocrator icon of Sinai captures the human and divine elements of Jesus as Christ in a way that no other Byzantine icon has ever done. The holistic balance between each element illustrated in his face is emphasized by a larger unity between the face and body of Christ Pantocrator. The style of Christ Pantocrator is a physical positioning that implies divinity and surrounds the beautiful life-like face, implying a harmonious blend between the human, Jesus of Nazareth, who is also the divine Christ Pantocrator.

The Ecumenical Councils of developed the Christian theology regarding the relationship between the two natures of Jesus as Christ. The Councils determined that Jesus as Christ was both fully human and fully divine, and that these natures existed distinctly in unity and balance with each other. As a result of these conclusions, the officially promoted icons made after the period of iconoclasm should in theory incorporate both natures of Jesus as Christ. In fact, the post-iconoclastic Byzantine icons place emphasis on the divinity of Jesus as Christ through the use of golden faces, and emotionless, ethereal looking expressions.

Christ Pantocrator is unlike the majority of later Byzantine icons because both natures of Jesus as Christ are represented. Although the Ecumenical Councils decided that both elements should be depicted, later icons appear unable to achieve a balance of both natures. Christ Pantocrator achieves the unity the councils desired and depicted each nature of Jesus as Christ in way that no other icon does.

The Christ Pantocrator mosaics of Daphni and Hosios Lukas have furthered the possibilities for incorporating both natures in an alternative form from other post-iconoclastic icons. These later Christ Pantocrators integrate the humanity of Jesus as Christ, illustrating both of his natures. While the Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator is a near copy of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator, it still contains the dimensionless, golden face of so many other late Byzantine icons. Ultimately, the Hosios Lukas Christ Pantocrator fails to strike the harmonious balance between both natures as seen in the Sinai Christ Pantocrator. The Daphni Christ Pantocrator incorporates a dark and almost angry human expression into the divine framework of the Christ Pantocrator positioning. While both human and divine elements are present in the Daphni Christ Pantocrator, they are not balanced in the subtle method seen in the Sinai Christ Pantocrator. The desire to visibly incorporate both divine and human elements of Jesus as Christ was sought in later icons, but ultimately the highly developed artistry and complex harmony seen in the Sinai Christ Pantocrator is unmatched.

Christ Pantocrator is fascinating because there are so few pre-iconoclastic icons of Jesus as Christ. The rarity of these images allowed me to use Christ Pantocrator as a glimpse into how Byzantine Christians interpreted the complexity of the relationship between the two natures of Jesus as Christ. Christ Pantocrator is not the only pre-iconoclastic image of Jesus as Christ. While these images are rare, they all individually provide a snapshot in time to illustrate the theological understanding of early Christology. To further this study in the future, I would like to look into other early icons of Jesus as Christ to draw connections between the official orthodox understandings promoted in the Ecumenical Councils and the influences of heretical groups and artistic movements surrounding the former Roman Empire.

One of the most wonderful and unintended benefits of engaging in this research was the opportunity to expose those around me to the Christ Pantocrator icon and Byzantine art and theology. Professors, students of religion, and other Mount Holyoke students have listened with patience to my thoughts on this issue. In doing so, Byzantine scholarship has a small but significant presence in my small pocket of academia. This may have sparked other inquisitive minds to pursue similar topics, and at the very least, my teachers and peers now have some knowledge of an often forgotten moment in time.

Although Kurt Weitzmann has provided documentation and analysis of the Sinai Christ Pantocrator, it has never been adequately situated in the context of

the larger theological debates of the church. I see Christ Pantocrator as the reflection of the hotly contested Christological controversies that are visible in this painting. I believe that Christ Pantocrator may in fact be the ultimate image depicting the natures of Jesus as Christ in a balanced harmony.

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