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(editors)

Image and dogma: tradition and continuity
in Christian Art

Imagine și dogmă: tradiție și continuitate
în Arta Creștină

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Introduction

This volume brings together the studies and research presented within the Sacred Art section – *Image and Dogma: Tradition and Continuity in Christian Art. The First Ecumenical Synod of Nicaea (325): Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives*, held at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University of Craiova from October 21 to 23, 2025. This section provided a space for interdisciplinary dialogue in which specialists in sacred art, theology, art history, and conservation–restoration explored the profound relationship between the artistic expression of the Church and the theological tradition grounded in the decisions of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

By bringing together these contributions, the volume offers a broad perspective on the relationship between image and dogma, on the continuity of the Christian artistic tradition, and on the role that research, interdisciplinary dialogue, and restoration play in the transmission of sacred heritage. It highlights both the academic dimension and the ethical responsibility associated with the study and preservation of sacred art. At the same time, the volume stands as a testimony to the scientific and cultural value of the Sacred Art section and as an invitation to further explore the visual and theological meanings of Christian art, reaffirming the central place of the image in the spiritual and cultural life of Orthodox communities.

The contributions included in this volume reflect the diversity of topics, from the iconographic analysis of synodal representations and hagiographic compositions to the study of traditional iconographic techniques and the examination of conservation–restoration methodologies applied to ecclesiastical heritage. These studies highlight the manner in which the Christian image, as a visual expression of dogma, preserves the continuity of a tradition that spans centuries and remains relevant for contemporary communities.

The studies dedicated to the restoration of liturgical objects and wooden icons emphasize the importance of preserving sacred materiality, showing that technical interventions are not operations performed simply on an artistic object, but acts of responsibility toward the spiritual memory these artefacts carry. Restoration may be understood as a gesture of cultural and liturgical continuity: through the material stabilization of the icon, one preserves its ability to fulfil its theological, pedagogical, and ecclesial function. From this perspective, the restorer does more than reconstruct material structures, they renew the connection between the community and its own visual tradition, between past generations and those yet to come.

In parallel, the iconographic and theological analyses presented during the symposium highlight the ways in which the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea continues to shape the visual language of the Church, influencing artistic compositions, thematic structures, and the narrative structure of the image. The canonization of the representation of the Holy Fathers,

the definition of the relationship between image and doctrinal truth, and the establishment of the didactic function of the icon - all find resonance in the artworks examined. These studies demonstrate that, beyond their historical context, the synodal decisions established a coherent iconographic structure that extends across the centuries and remains recognizable in frescoes, panel icons, and the compositional structures characteristic of Christian art. Each representation thus becomes a dialogue between the rigor of tradition and artistic creativity, between canonical continuity and interpretive expression.

Through the bringing together of these contributions, the volume offers an extensive perspective on the relationship between image and dogma, on the continuity of the Christian artistic tradition, and on the role that research, interdisciplinary dialogue, and conservation–restoration practices play in the transmission of sacred heritage. It highlights both the academic dimension and the ethical responsibility associated with the study and preservation of sacred art. At the same time, the volume stands as a testament to the scientific and cultural value of the Sacred Art section and as an invitation to further explore the visual and theological meanings of Christian art, reaffirming the central place of the image in the spiritual and cultural life of the Orthodox tradition.

Pr. Conf. Univ. dr. Adrian Ivan
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Introducere

Volumul de față reunește studiile și cercetările prezentate în cadrul secțiunii Artă Sacră – *Imagine și dogmă: tradiție și continuitate în arta creștină*, parte integrantă a Simpozionului Internațional *Christian Paradigm of a United Europe. The First Ecumenical Synod of Nicaea (325): Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives*, desfășurat la Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă a Universității din Craiova în perioada 21–23 octombrie 2025. Această secțiune a oferit un spațiu de dialog interdisciplinar în care specialiști din domeniul artei sacre, teologiei, istoriei artei și conservării–restaurării au explorat relația profundă dintre expresia artistică a Bisericii și tradiția teologică ce își are temelia în hotărârile Sinodului I Ecumenic de la Niceea.

Prin reunirea acestor contribuții, volumul oferă o perspectivă amplă asupra legăturii dintre imagine și dogmă, asupra continuității tradiției artistice creștine și asupra rolului pe care cercetarea, dialogul interdisciplinar și restaurarea îl au în transmiterea patrimoniului sacru. El evidențiază atât dimensiunea academică, cât și responsabilitatea etică asociată studiului și conservării artei sacre. În același timp, volumul devine o mărturie a valorii științifice și culturale a secțiunii Artă Sacră și o invitație la aprofundarea sensurilor vizuale și teologice ale artei creștine, reafirmând locul central al imaginii în viața spirituală și culturală a comunităților ortodoxe.

Contribuțiile incluse reflectă diversitatea temelor abordate, de la analiza iconografică a reprezentărilor sinodale și a compozițiilor hagiografice, până la studiul tehnicilor tradiționale de realizare a icoanelor și examinarea metodologiilor de conservare–restaurare aplicate patrimoniului bisericesc. Aceste cercetări evidențiază modul în care imaginea creștină, în calitatea sa de expresie vizuală a dogmei, păstrează continuitatea unei tradiții care traversează secole și rămâne relevantă pentru comunitățile contemporane.

Studiile dedicate restaurării obiectelor de cult și icoanelor pe suport de lemn subliniază importanța protejării materiei sacre, arătând că intervențiile tehnice nu reprezintă doar operații asupra unui obiect artistic, ci și acte de responsabilitate față de memoria spirituală pe care aceste artefacte o poartă. Restaurarea devine, astfel, un gest de continuitate culturală și liturgică: prin stabilizarea materială a icoanei se păstrează, de fapt, posibilitatea ca aceasta să-și împlinească în continuare funcția teologică, pedagogică și comunitară. În această perspectivă, restauratorul nu doar reface structuri materiale, ci reînnoiește puntea dintre comunitate și propria ei tradiție vizuală, dintre generațiile trecute și cele viitoare.

În paralel, analizele iconografice și teologice prezentate în cadrul simpozionului scot în evidență felul în care Sinodul I Ecumenic de la Niceea continuă să modeleze limbajul vizual al Bisericii, influențând compozițiile artistice, temele reprezentate și structura narativă a imaginii. Canonizarea reprezentării sfinților părinți, definirea raportului dintre imagine și adevărul de credință, stabilirea funcției didactice a icoanei – toate acestea își găsesc ecou în operele de artă analizate. Studiile demonstrează că, dincolo de contextul istoric, deciziile

sinodale au generat un cadru vizual coerent, care traversează secolele și continuă să fie recognoscibil în fresce, icoane pe lemn și în structurile compoziționale specifice artei creștine. Fiecare reprezentare devine, astfel, un dialog între rigoarea tradiției și creativitate, între continuitatea canonică și interpretarea artistică.

Prin reuniunea acestor contribuții, volumul oferă o perspectivă amplă asupra relației dintre imagine și dogmă, asupra continuității tradiției artistice creștine și asupra rolului pe care cercetarea, dialogul interdisciplinar și restaurarea îl au în transmiterea patrimoniului sacru. El evidențiază atât dimensiunea academică, cât și responsabilitatea etică asociată studiului și conservării artei sacre. În același timp, volumul se constituie într-o mărturie a valorii științifice și culturale a secțiunii Artă Sacră și într-o invitație la aprofundarea sensurilor vizuale și teologice ale artei creștine, reafirmând locul central al imaginii în viața spirituală și culturală a tradiției ortodoxe.

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The First Ecumenical Council in the Theology of St. Patriarch Euthimius of Tarnovo

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Abstract:

The article examines how the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (325 AD) is presented and functions in the theology of St. Patriarch Euthimius of Tarnovo during the second half of the 14th century. The author points out that despite the vast temporal distance, the paradigms and canons of the Council remained relevant for Orthodox Christians in the Balkans. Patriarch Euthimius interpreted and applied the theological and canonical heritage of the First Ecumenical Council comprehensively. It was addressed both to the palace (via the Eulogy for the Tzar's instruction) and to the desert (via the Epistle to Cyprian for monastic practice).

Key words: Council, Nicaea, St. Euthimius, St. Constantine, Cyprian

The First Ecumenical Council is mentioned in two of St. Euthymius' writings – the *Eulogy of Saints Constantine and Helena*, and in the *Epistle to Cyprian*.¹ Both have different addresses and tasks – one to a tzar's in the palace and the other to a monk in the desert – but both texts are giving a clear picture on the how the memory of 1st Ecumenical council functions among the orthodox Christians on the Balkans 1000 years later. Despite of this temporal distance of ten centuries, the recommendations, based on its paradigms and canons, are still actual at the second part of the 14th century. Their relevance today is another side of the topic and the door for discussion is wide open.

In this paper I have two parts, each of them observing the two sources.

¹ Full collection of St Euthimius' texts in medieval Bulgarian language is published by Емил Калужняцки (Emil Kaluzhniacki), Съчинения на Българския патриарх Евтимий, Велико Търново – ВТУ издателство, 2010. Full collection of St Euthimius' text in modern Bulgarian language is published in Патриарх Евтимий, Съчинения, София – Издателство Наука и изкуство, 1990. The critical notes are according to the latest edition.

1. The Eulogy

I will start the observation of Eulogy with the comment of the Romanian linguist and philologist Gheorghe Mihăilă (1930-2011): “*The main source of Euthymius is the life of Tzar Constantine by Eusebius of Caesarea, used most often not directly, but through the church history of Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopoulos (1256-1317).*

“*So, indebted to Eusebius (whom he uses directly and especially indirectly) – to Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopoulos, as well as to Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, Theodoret, Philistorgius, Theophanes (...) – Euthymius borrows entire excerpts from the work of his Byzantine predecessor, translating directly, or abbreviating, and perhaps using other sources, but giving a coherent exposition, with a personal contribution and subordinated to his own understanding. So he must be appreciated for the fact that he used the richest and newest source, widespread at that time in the Byzantine Empire, as well as the most detailed and authentic contemporary source for Tzar Constantine, and that he made it accessible to the Bulgarians, to the Slavs in general and to the Valahians.*”²

The Patriarch embarked on this work not simply because of his love for ancient history or the life of Constantine in particular. His choice was prompted by an event and an addressee directly related to his life and ministry. The recipient of the work was the young Bulgarian tzar Joan Shishman (II. 1), who ascended the throne in 1371. This was the same year in which, after the Battle of Chernomen (September 26, 1371), the fate of the Christian kingdoms in the Balkans seemed predetermined. At the time of his coronation, the Tzar was 21 years old.

St Euthymius (II. 2) indicates the purpose of writing the *Eulogy* at its very end of it [28.] with the words:

This is a beloved gift from us to you, most pious tzar Joan Shishman, you who prompted us to this word, here is the much-desired treasure! We did not compose this word, guided by false tales, but from true and unfalsifying witnesses we chose unfalsified knowledge; these the diligent will find in the divine writings.

It is worth mentioning here that in the Byzantine tradition only one emperor was given the honor of being called Equal to the Apostles and to be counted among the saints and this one is Constantine the Great. There were undoubtedly other emperors who led honorable and pious lives, and some, such as Theophilus (829-842) and Theodore I Laskaris (1205-1222), Constantine IX Monomach (1042-1054), Isaak II Angel (1185-1195) and Ioan V Paleolog (1341-1391) took monastic vows at the end of their lives. Without a doubt, Constantine the Great remains a role model and standard for all of them, and not only for them but for the Christian tzars of Bulgaria also.

² Михаила, Георги. „Похвално слово за Константин и Елена” в светлината на новите изследвания, in - Търновска книжовна школа, т. 5, В. Търново – ВТУ издателство, 1989, с. 60.

It can be assumed that the looming difficult times and having in mind the inexperience of the young monarch, the patriarch was prompted to seek encouragement and support through a description of the life of Constantine the Great.

The monarch's attitude towards the Church has been given as an example many times³. And not just for the Church as a structured community, but rather the core of the Church, its faith. And what more obvious illustration of the attitude towards the church faith can there be than the emperor's concern for church unity through the convening of a council. Thus, the council, convened by the emperor in Nicaea, becomes a major sub-theme in the life of Constantine.

In his description of the council we can we can highlight five topics: the reason, the initiative, the holding, the decision, and the consequences of the Council.

a. The reason for the council is described with a short expose concerning the theological ideas of s.c. *demon-named Arius, possessed by the spirit of wickedness*.⁴ The first is that the Son of God is created and the second, which is a logical consequence from the first – that the Father existed without the Son. The reason is lack of biblical knowledge and here we have the explanation:

„Because he {Arius} forgot what was said: “And the Word was with God... and all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” And again the Apostle Paul, speaking very clearly, said: “And after that the Father hath spoken unto us by his Son... through whom he made the ages, he who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person (the brightness of glory and the express image of his substance), upholding all things by the word of his power, having made purification for our sins by himself, sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:2-3). And again – Thomas after that terrible touch called him Lord and God (see John 20:28). But Nathanael also said: “Rabbi! Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:49). Arius, possessed by the spirit of wickedness, understood none of this, nor did he hear even Solomon, who said: “God by wisdom established the heavens” (Prov. 3:19). And Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”⁵

³ “The divine Constantine was taking care of piety and church affairs.”[c. 124]

⁴ “In Alexandria the demon-named Arius raged against Christ and made his evil intention clear to all, daring to demean the Son of God and our God the Lord Jesus Christ in creation and daring to say with his vile mouth that the Father once existed when the Son (as yet) did not exist... Arius, possessed by the spirit of wickedness, understood none of this...” [Ibid.]

⁵ Ibid, c. 125.

The confusion for all Christians is described as *great*⁶. This is of course true from a historical point of view, but in this case it strengthens the role of the emperor. And here is the moment the role of the emperor and the ruler in general to be indicated. Being a *champion of piety and the imitator of Christ* the ruler – emperor or czar – have to act on the level of *Vicarius Christi*⁷. His personal piety is an aspect of his responsibility for the Church and vice versa – caring for the Church is a testimony to his personal faith and imitation of Christ.

b. The emperor's initiative is described as two-dimensional. At **first**, he wants the two disputing parties – Arius and his bishop Alexander of Alexandria – to reach a truce⁸. Constantine sends a same letter to both of them. The text of the letter is presented by Euthimius fully⁹. **Second** step was made after refusal of Arius to terminate his activity.¹⁰ The emperor decides to convene a council. He didn't invite, but he "*sent strict messages throughout the whole earth, ordering that the bishops of God from the whole earth should be summoned to a council*"¹¹.

⁶ *By such and similar (things) the wicked one incited discord and gatherings in the churches of God; and all who were connected with the church were in great confusion.* [Ibid.]

⁷ According to *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*: "Traditionally this title [*Vicarius Christi*] was used by the Roman emperors of the East, while the pope was called the vicar of Petrer or *Vicarius Petri*." (NY, Paulist Press, 2000, p. 432).

⁸ „*When Constantine, the champion of piety and the imitator of Christ, heard of this, he was sorely wounded in his heart and greatly grieved in spirit. He did not wish to give occasion to the discord, but like a prudent physician, wisely mixing the medicines, wisely wishing to unite the two (parties) in peace and harmony and to secure tranquility for the Church, he wrote to both equally, so that neither of them might be exalted in his heart above the other, and the quarrels and discords might not continue indefinitely.*”, Патриарх Евтимий..., с. 126.

⁹ „*The venerable victor Constantine to Alexander and Arius. The occasion for your dispute has caused me a double wound. Therefore, I call to witness the very helper of my undertakings and the savior of all - God, so that you may put an end to this dispute. Otherwise, you will cause me great grief, and to yourself no small confusion and great shame, because the discord of all nations, united in a single prudence, and the body of the universe (universe body) fused into one, you are again beginning to dismember into pieces. Therefore, having cast aside all quarreling, strive for peace and unanimity, and do not lay the great burden of this on us. Therefore, grant me peaceful days and nights of security, so that I too may enjoy a little of the sweetness of pure light and a carefree life. Otherwise, I must weep and weep.*” [Ibid.]

¹⁰ „*Arius, having been silent for a while, again stirred up a greater disturbance, tearing a considerable number of people from the Church; he would create other discords and assemblies.*” [Ibid.]

¹¹ *When Constantine, the most Christian, heard of such things, he was greatly grieved in his heart and did not know what to do. Seeing how discords and assemblies were raging in many places, he devised a godly decision, pleasing to all who could judge correctly according to God. And he sent strict messages throughout the whole earth, ordering that the bishops of God from the whole earth should be summoned to a council and that a single faith should be imposed on all of them. "What is partial and private," he said, "is not sound, nor fully established, but what is considered and chosen by many (from many) is very sound and unshakable."* [Ibid.]

This was not first council of the Church and not a first case, provoking bishops to take decisions concerning Church faith or order. After the council of the apostles (cf. Acts 15:6-31) this form was the used everywhere and the apostolic words *For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us*¹²(15:28) become a measure and standard for the applicability of solutions. But here there is something radically new. This was the first time when the initiative for the Church council came from the Roman Caesar.¹³ And as we see in the text of *the Eulogy* Constantine *sent strict messages and ordering*, not inviting or asking. This policy, imposed by Constantine, would be used by every subsequent emperor as an element of Byzantine political philosophy. The emperors – or pious basileuses – of the following eras were already thought of as internal guarantors for the Church, whose powers also included the protection of the borders – state and church. Sporadic clashes with the theological visions of the semi-Arians, Monothelites and iconoclasts emperors were exceptions that did not challenge the norm. In the late period of the Roman Empire we even have the right explicitly protected only by the emperor to convene an ecumenical or any other dogmatic council.¹⁴

We will see the illustration of this model in the iconography of the ecumenical councils. In each of the compositions, the central place is reserved for the emperor. The iconographic program in many monastery churches, especially those built by rulers, includes scenes from the ecumenical councils. Examples of this are seen in monasteries such as Hurezi and Cozia (II. 3) in Romania, the church of St. Peter and Paul in Tarnovo, and many others. This testifies to the succession on the part of each other orthodox christian ruler – king, tzar, or emperor – who would borrow the Byzantine governance model, in their own context.

c. The holding of the Council is described in the following chapters as a triumph of church-state unity. The hierarchs of God gathered with joy into the city of Nicaea with an *immense desire to*

¹² Citation according to *King James Bible*.

¹³ Concerning similarities between Roman senat and the Ecumenical council sf. Пашков, Д. „Сенат и Синод в позднеримской империи” – В: *Богословские труды*, 43-44, 2012, с. 471-480.

¹⁴ In his “Apologetic Speech to the Bishop of Cotrona Against the Latins for the Holy Spirit,” Nicean Emperor Theodore II Laskaris wrote: “*But pay attention to this too, most holy man: of all the previous councils at which the hierarchs presiding over the churches have gathered, not a single council was held by the order of any of these hierarchs: neither the blessed Pope of ancient Rome, nor the Patriarch of Constantinople, nor the Pope of Alexandria, nor the Patriarch of Antioch, nor of Jerusalem, nor anyone else, but all the councils were gathered by royal order. For the Basileus had the authority to convene them, and without the royal order nothing of the kind would have happened. The Basileus also provided for the convocation and the assembly in the necessary place. And most importantly – when the most holy ones were in disagreement about dogmas, who but the Basileus himself could distinguish those who were speaking the truth?*”. Cf. Stoyadinov, M. *The Iconography of Ecumenical Councils and the Byzantine (New Roman) Political Philosophy*, in: *Ars Liturgica. From the Image of Glory to the Images of the Idols of Modernity*, ISSTA 2017, Vol. 1, Alba Iulia, 2017, p. 210.

enjoy the image and discourses of such a pious tzar.¹⁵ The opening session and the duration of all discussions are also indicated. The council began on the 20th day of the month of May, and ended after three and a half years.

The emperor's opening speech is an encouragement to achieve good results so *that God's bride, the Church*, may abide in peace and tranquility.¹⁶ The *Eulogy* does not comment in depth on theological debates, but only illustrates the decisive contribution of the ruler. The position of the Caesar is actually to provide all the necessary conditions so that the hierarchs can reach the desired agreement. Constantine himself relies not only on his strength or ability to win, but also on God's help.

d. The council achieved the desired unity, in which every evil intention was defeated and every disagreement was overcome. The final act was delegated again to the emperor – he was the one who signed the final document: *(the scroll) was signed by the royal hand through the action of the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity*.¹⁷ The theological contribution of the council, namely the proclamation *that the Son of God is consubstantial (co-consubstantial) and consubstantial (consubstantial) and inseparable from the Father and the Holy Spirit*, was solemnly and officially confirmed. We can assume that John Shishman was theologically literate enough to understand the meaning of this Trinitarian dogma.

¹⁵ *Therefore, when the hierarchs of God from all over the earth heard this, they were overcome with inexpressible joy, and with all their hearts they made every effort and, as if flying on wings, they reached the city of Nicaea, which is in Bithynia, because they had an immense desire to enjoy the image and discourses of such a pious tzar... Therefore, they all stood, awaiting the tzar's arrival. And he, like an angel sent by God, shining, as they say, with bright rays, stood in front in bright porfira.* [Ibid.]

¹⁶ *"The end of my prayer, O servants of Christ, contained this – to enjoy your image. Since today I have received (what I desired), I confess the grace of the Omniscient, the Tzar of all, because He has granted me, besides all other benefits, to see this best benefit – that you are all of one mind. For therefore I greatly desire that the bride of God, the Church, should dwell in untroubled silence. When I was winning victories in battles according to the will of my Christ, the Son of God, I did not give myself up to sorrow at all; but when I suddenly learned of your division, I was wounded with the most bitter wound and wished to offer this remedy, sending from everywhere to gather your holiness. And I rejoice with Jacob, seeing the host of God around me, I sing with David and say: How terrible is this place! This is none other than the house of God!" (Gen. 28:17) [Ibid. c. 126]*

¹⁷ *When the council was over and the lie was exposed by the perfectly true (priests), the tongue that spoke arrogantly fell silent and all confirmed the faith handed down by the apostles. They also wrote a scroll in which they set forth the Symbol of Faith. After this other holy council was held in Nicaea in Bithynia and (the scroll) was signed by the royal hand through the action of the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity, the champions of the true faith, the divine fathers, clarified the correct faith and overthrew Arius and his like-minded people (...) The holy 318 fathers, signing the scroll all together with the venerable Constantine, confessed unanimously that the Son of God is consubstantial (co-consubstantial) and consubstantial (consubstantial) and inseparable from the Father and the Holy Spirit. [Ibid.]*