Panel: “Heresy and War”

Aaron Ostermeyer

Title: “The Veneration of Icons in Byzantine Society”
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Suzanne LaVere
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Aaron Ostermeyer is a History major, who has served as a Student Success Coach in the Mastodon Advising Center in Kettler Hall since the school year began. In this position he helps fellow students with varying issues such as test anxiety, social support, and consulting probation students. He also helps students with finding the resources they may need across campus. He has served as an extern with the Allen County Superior Court and shadowed Judge Wendy Davis. During Summer 2015, he was part of the IPFW Student Life’s Orientation Assistant Team where he assisted incoming students and their families in becoming more familiar with our campus.

Abstract

This paper concerns the religious controversy known as Iconoclasm within the Byzantine Empire. The heresy of Iconoclasm still divides scholars today due to the fact that it involves a number of different potential theological, social, and political factors. The origins of Iconoclasm are complex, and as the controversy over images continued, it became even more complicated. Iconoclasm would in fact last for nearly 100 years within the Byzantine Empire. This division over the proper role of icons in the Byzantine Empire is represented by the conflict between Iconodules, or "image lovers," and Iconoclasts, or "breakers of images." The heart of the Iconoclastic debate within the Byzantine Empire revolved around the idea that people might misdirect their veneration towards the image rather than the actual holy figure that is represented on the icon. By potentially misdirecting their veneration towards the image rather than what the image is supposed to be representing, the fear was that the person was essentially worshipping a false idol. The Iconodule side of this debate would become the eventual winning side of this complex controversy, but Byzantine Iconoclasm would serve to influence future movements outside of the Byzantine Empire.

Bibliographical Note

While the majority of the sources used for my paper were books, I also used a number of scholarly journals as well as one online website. The source that I found to be the most helpful in conducting my research was Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm by Leslie Brubaker. Another source I found to be highly useful was Theodore the Studite: Writings on Iconoclasm, translated by Thomas Cattoi. This source contained primary documents from people who lived during the time of Byzantine Iconoclasm, which proved instrumental in gaining more insight on the topic from famous Iconodule or Iconoclastic figures. The source that surprised me the most was the Byzantine Iconoclasm section for the Metropolitan Museum of Art website. This website had a number of topics about Byzantine Iconoclasm as well as many intriguing images of icons from the period.