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THE THEODOSIAN FAMILY, BISHOP LEO I OF ROME, AND THEIR COMPETITION FOR PIETY THROUGH THEIR CORRESPONDENCE

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Abstract

This article investigates the entreaties sent to the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II and his elder sister Pulcheria Augusta by their Western imperial family members Valentinian III, Galla Placidia and Licinia Eudoxia on behalf of Bishop Leo I of Rome on 22 February 450, and Theodosius' replies. Instead of focusing on the outcome of this diplomatic correspondence, it analyzes the rhetoric of each letter and compares the arguments used with Bishop Leo's own letters on this matter to the Eastern imperial court. It is argued that Theodosius and his family competed for piety and hence power by manipulating their shared cultural framework of decision making. Despite this shared framework they came to contrasting conclusions, because they all claimed to act in accordance with Bishop Leo's wishes. Moreover, the entreaties of Valentinian, Galla Placidia and Licinia Eudoxia, albeit aiming at the same goal of creating an image of Western unity around Leo's theology, also testify to their individual interests: whereas Valentinian and Galla Placidia sought to enhance the status of the city of Rome, Licinia Eudoxia tried to reinforce her personal influence over her father. In appendix, finally, this article offers the first full English translation of the seven letters under discussion. Thus, it offers new insights in the processes of imperial decision making around the Church councils of the mid-fifth century, and discloses an understudied yet unique case of imperial family correspondence.

Key words

Letter writing, diplomacy, Church councils, Bishop Leo I of Rome, Theodosius II, Valentinian III

On 22 February AD 450, Bishop Leo I of Rome fell to his knees before the Western imperial family,[1] who were visiting the church of Saint Peter in Rome on occasion of the Saint's name day.[2] In a tear-choked voice Leo, who was surrounded by bishops congre-

[1] Leo's supplication was, in fact, a common form of delivering a petition. On this form see Peter Van Nuffelen, *Performing Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), chapter 2 (under "Personal interaction").

[2] C. Silva-Tarouca argues that this happened earlier, on the occasion of the Ember days *(quatuor tempora)* of December 449: "Nuovi studi sulle antiche lettere dei Papi," *Greg.* 12 (1931): 390-392. Since Leo was surrounded by bishops, Silva-Tarouca connects this event to the Roman Synod of October 449. Moreover, he deduces from Valentinian's letter that the described holiday had a vigil, which would also refer back to the Ember days. P. Peeters rightly counters this by stating that Valentinian would not have

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gated with him for the occasion,[3] begged them to petition the emperor in Constantinople for a new general Church council in Italy which would undo the Second Council of Ephesus. This council, later nicknamed by Leo as "the Robber Council", had condemned Bishop Flavian of Constantinople.[4] Heeding Leo's supplication, the Western Roman emperor Valentinian III, his mother Galla Placidia and his spouse Licinia Eudoxia wrote to their cousin, nephew and father, the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II. Moreover, Galla Placidia also wrote a letter to Theodosius' elder sister, her niece Pulcheria. The threefold question to Theodosius resulted in three replies: Theodosius answered negatively, but he adapted his reaction to the ears of each recipient. This article does not investigate *why* Theodosius declined his family's requests, but rather *how* he did this, and how he was approached differently by each family member. Moreover, it offers the first full translation in a modern language of this letter sequence, disclosing this under-studied and unique case of imperial family correspondence. Ultimately, it demonstrates how the political decision-making around the Church councils in the mid-fifth century also staged the imperial competition between East and West over the discourse of Christian orthodoxy, imperial piety, and ultimately the power to make decisions.

Crucial for the transmission of these letters were the events after February 450. In the summer of that same year, a few months after rejecting his family's requests, Theodosius fell off his horse and died. Then, his elder sister Pulcheria married Marcian, *domesticus* of the influential Germanic general Aspar,[5] and together with him convened Leo's so sorely desired council in Chalcedon (October 451). The epistles under scrutiny survived with the Greek Chalcedonian council minutes, containing the purportedly verbatim records of the council sessions.[6] The original language of these letters was Latin, and Marcian's officials included them as such together with a Greek translation in the council

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erred in describing this as the holiday of St Peter, and that a duration of two months for the Roman Synod (October to December 449) is improbable. P. Peeters, review of *Novi studi sulle antiche lettere dei Papi*, by Carlo Silva-Tarouca, *AnBoll* 50 (1932): 396. *Idem* Stephan Otto Horn, *Petrou Kathedra: der Bischof von Rom und die Synoden von Ephesus (449) und Chalcedon* (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei, 1982), 107 n. 3.

[3] On this Roman synod *cf.* Horn, *Petrou Kathedra*, 106 and 108.

[4] Notably, as Philippe Blaudeau pointed out to me, Leo invented this nickname only after Theodosius' death: Leo to Pulcheria, July 20, 451, *ACO* II.4, 51.3-5 (no. 51): *... nec opus est epistulari pagina conprehendi quidquid in illo Epheseno non iudicio, sed latricinio potuit perpetrari ...* Leo, *ep.* 95. Tr. Edmund Hunt, *St. Leo the Great. Letters*, FC 34 (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1957)*,* 169: "And there is no need to include in the writing of a letter what they were able to perpetrate at that robbery at Ephesus; it was not a council."

[5] On the relationship between Pulcheria and Aspar *cf.* R.L. Hohlfelder, "Marcian's Gamble: A Reassessment of Eastern Imperial Policy toward Attila AD 450-453," *AJAH* 9 (2017): 54–69, arguing that it was cooperative rather than manipulative. *Contra* Richard W. Burgess, "The Accession of Marcian in the Light of Chalcedonian Apologetic and Monophysite Polemic," *ByZ* 86/87 (1994): 47-68 at 68. *Cf.* Rene Pfeilschifter, *Der Kaiser und Konstantinopel. Kommunikation und Konfliktaustrag in einer spätantiken Metropole* (Berlin/Boston: Walter De Gruyter, 2013), 512-516, on Aspar's political power between AD 427 and 450.

[6] On the production and nature of late antique council acts: Mary K. Farag, *What Makes a Church Sacred? Legal and Ritual Perspectives from Late Antiquity*, TCH 63 (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021), 57-58. Thomas Graumann, *The Acts of Early Church Councils: Production and Character*, OECS (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), esp. parts IV and V (chapters 11-18).

acts around AD 453-455.[7] In the sixth century, the Latin originals were copied into a Latin version of the Chalcedonian acts. My analysis is based on the Latin archetypes, which in all probability survive in this Latin collection.[8] It should be noted here that the transmission of these imperial letters attests to the scope of their intended audience, including at least the higher clergy in Constantinople and Rome, and thereby to their public character. These letters were carefully crafted to display not only the public image of the author, but also his or her desired relationship with the addressee. Moreover, regardless of the actual writers of these letters (possibly the quaestor or other functionaries),[9] they were written in the names of the imperial family members themselves, who thus claimed the letters' ownership.[10]

Whereas the council minutes of Chalcedon have received ample attention thanks to the translation by Price and Gaddis, the Chalcedonian letters and letter collections remain a neglected subject.[11] They were edited alongside the council minutes by Eduard Schwartz in the 1930s.[12] Schwartz also examined the political purpose behind the *collec-tions*, but he did not analyze the rhetoric of the individual letters.[13] Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the present sequence of imperial family correspondence is still lacking. The correspondence has already been described for example by Fergus Millar, who treats it

[7] The extant Greek manuscripts have not preserved the original Latin text, but Eduard Schwartz explains how the survival of certain subtitles testifies to the inclusion of the authentic Latin text in the original fifth-century Greek letter collections (e.g. introducing Theodosius' answer to his daughter Licinia Eudoxia: 'of these Roman [texts] is this the translation, the [words] having been put into Greek'; *ACO* II.1.1, 8.4 (M7)). *ACO* II.4, xxiii. This also renders it highly probable that the sixth-century Latin collections contain faithful copies of the Latin originals. *Cf.* Eduard Schwartz, *Der sechste nicaenische Kanon auf der Synode von Chalkedon*, SPAW.PH. Sonderausgabe (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1930), 615; *ACO* I.3, x; *ACO* II.4, xx; Philippe Blaudeau, "*L'évêque de Rome Léon, la cour de Valentinien III et la controverse christologique (448-455)*," paper pre-sented at the international conference *Das Weströmische Reich und seine Erforschung – neue Perspektiven, Universität Jena,* June 2-4, 2021 (dir. T. Stickler and U. Roberto), under the heading *Une documentation remarquable.*

[8] The so-called *epistularum ante gesta collectio*. *ACO* II.3.1, 13.1-17.6 (L18 to L24).

[9] On the likelihood of a single authorship for the Western family letters *cf.* Julia Hillner, "Empresses, Queens, and Letters: Finding a 'Female Voice' in Late Antiquity?" *Gender & History* 31 (2019): 353-382 at 360 and 369.

[10] I thank Jill Harries for this insight.

[11] Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, eds., *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, TTH 45 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), with further references. Later studies on Chalcedon include Sandra Leuenberger-Wenger, *Das Konzil von Chalcedon und die Kirche. Konflikte und Normierungsprozesse im 5. und 6. Jahrhundert* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Hagit Amirav, *Authority and Performance: Sociological Perspectives on the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Tommaso Mari, "The Latin Translations of the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 58 (2018): 126–155; Tommaso Mari, "Working on the Minutes of Late Antique Church Councils. A Methodological Framework," *JLARC* 13 (2019): 42–59; Tommaso Mari, "Greek, Latin, and More: Multilingualism at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon," *Journal of Latin Linguistics* 19 (2020): 59–87.

[12] *ACO* II.

[13] Especially in *ACO* II.1.1, viii-xiiii. *Cf.* Eduard Schwartz, *Publizistische Sammlungen zum acacianischen Schisma*, ABAW.PH 10 (München: Beck, 1934); Eduard Schwartz, "Die Kanonessammlungen der alten Reichskirche," *ZRG.KA* 25 (1936): 1–114.

as an example of *ineffective* persuasion during Theodosius' reign, and Susan Wessel, who views Leo's effort as an *effective* collaboration between Church and State, and as a challenge to imperial authority against which Theodosius had to defend himself.[14] Instead of focusing on the outcome of this diplomatic correspondence, this article compares the arguments used by the correspondents and their rhetorical strategies to enhance or legitimize their political power. Thus, it illustrates how the Theodosian family members and Bishop Leo used their shared cultural framework of decision making for their own interests. Both form and content of their culturally scripted letters were determined by the formal and moral expectations of the late-antique elite, but each author manipulated these expectations to compete for imperial piety and its inherent power.[15] This is shown even more clearly by comparing the rhetoric in the Western imperial letters with that of Leo in his earlier correspondence to the Eastern imperial court on the same subject (October 13 and December 25, 449). It appears that the Western imperial family chose some different arguments than Leo in approaching Theodosius and his sister. This reveals that the Western imperial court did have its own agenda in petitioning the Eastern Roman emperor. The image of Western harmony presented by this imperial correspondence challenged Theodosius' God-given authority and hence his legitimacy as a ruler.[16] Ultimately, this rhetoric aimed at convincing the Eastern imperial court of the importance of the West in governing the Roman Empire.

In what follows, this article first sketches the historical context of the letters and their authors (section 1). Next, it discusses the correspondence between Valentinian III, Galla Placidia, Licinia Eudoxia, Theodosius, and Pulcheria (section 2), focusing on the divergent rhetoric of authority in these letters. Finally, in section 3, the different communication strategies adopted by the letter writers are compared with Leo's correspondence on this matter to Theodosius and Pulcheria respectively. In conclusion, it is argued that both Theodosius and his family used their letters as a means for self-representation to enhance their own political power. Moreover, they could come to contrasting conclusions despite their shared cultural framework because they all claimed to act in accordance with

[14] Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408-450)*, Sather Classical Lectures 64 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 231; Susan Wessel, *Leo the Great and the Spiritual Rebuilding of a Universal Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 263, 266-269. It is also described in Hagith Sivan, *Galla Placidia: The Last Roman Empress*, Women in Antiquity (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 137-141, following the conclusions of Wessel, but emphasizing the "vigor of imperial women" (p. 140).

[15] Form: *cf.* Laurens Ernst Tacoma, *Roman Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 14-17 and 261 on the function of the "rules of the game" in Roman political culture and the ensuing "scripted politics" limiting the agency of its participants. Content: *cf.* Van Nuffelen, *Performing Justice,* on the moral responsibility of social superiors in late-antique society to act according to justice. On the matching of senders and recipients *cf.* Andrew Gillett, "Advise the Emperor Beneficially: Lateral Communication in Diplomatic Embassies between the Post-Imperial West and Byzantium," in *Ambassadeurs et ambassades au coeur des relations diplomatiques: Rome, Occident Médiéval, Byzance (VIIIe s. avant J.-C.- XIIe s. après J.-C.)*, ed. Audrey Becker and Nicolas Drocourt (Metz: Centre de recherche universitaire Lorrain d'histoire, Université de Lorraine, site de Metz, 2013), 281; Hillner, "Female Voice," 359.

[16] *Cf.* Justin Matthew Pigott, *New Rome Wasn't Built in a Day: Rethinking Councils and Controversy at Early Constantinople 381-451* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 87-96.

Bishop Leo's wishes (section 4). In the appendix, finally, this article offers the first full English translation of the seven letters under discussion.

1. Theodosius II, the Western imperial court and Bishop Leo in 450

Theodosius' family in the West did not have much with which to pressure him. In fact, they owed their current position to their Eastern relative: in AD 425, Valentinian III had been put on the Western throne by a representative of Theodosius, after Eastern troops had defeated the usurper John.[17] Moreover, Valentinian's betrothal to Theodosius' daughter Licinia Eudoxia has been convincingly interpreted as a symbol of Eastern triumphalism.[18] In the 440s, however, despite advocating the principle of organic unity of the 'twin regimes', Theodosius nevertheless let the interests of his Eastern Roman Empire come first during the barbarian invasions.[19] It should therefore come as no surprise if Valentinian held a grudge against his dominant elder cousin, and that he actively sought to challenge Theodosius' public image of orthodox unity by supporting Bishop Leo. Still, Valentinian and his spouse Licinia Eudoxia had to act within their given framework: that of the dutiful daughter in the case of Licinia, and that of the loyal junior colleague and affectionate son in the case of Valentinian.[20] Their use of this rhetorical framework in their letters, as will be discussed below, testifies to the fact that the relationship between Theodosius II and his son-in-law and daughter was indeed troublesome.

Valentinian's mother Galla Placidia, on the other hand, held a stronger position than Valentinian and Licinia Eudoxia thanks to her age and lineage. Galla Placidia was a daughter of the late emperor Theodosius I. Besides, she was the half-sister of Arcadius, the father of the current emperor Theodosius II. She had been *Augusta* since AD 421 and had reigned over the Western Roman Empire as her son's regent from AD 425 until 437, when Valentinian arrived into adulthood and married his fiancée. Much earlier, in AD 419, she had already intervened in a conflict between two Roman bishops.[21] At the moment of writing her letter to the forty-eight-year-old Theodosius, Galla Placidia was sixty-two years old. She belonged to an earlier generation than her nephew and therefore, as will be explained below, communicated with him in a less subordinate fashion than her son and daughter-in-law. As a daughter of the late emperor Theodosius I, the grandfather

[17] Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 129. Peter Van Nuffelen, "Olympiodorus of Thebes and Eastern Triumphalism," in *Theodosius II: Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, ed. Christopher Kelly, CCS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 130-152 at 131.

[18] Peter Van Nuffelen, "Eastern Triumphalism," 133-134.

[19] Millar, *Greek Roman Empire,* 59.

[20] *Cf.* the speech held by a representative of the Roman Senate introducing the Theodosian Code in AD 437: "The immortal Emperor, Our Lord Valentinian, with the loyalty of a colleague and the affection of a son, approved this undertaking." (*CTh. Gesta Senatus* 2; tr. Clyde Pharr, ed., *The Theodosian Code and Novels, and the Sirmondian Constitutions*, The Corpus of Roman Law (Corpus Juris Romani), v. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 3).

[21] Blaudeau, "L'évêque de Rome Léon," under *Une documentation remarquable.*

of her nephew Theodosius II, Galla Placidia could claim a status which Valentinian and Licinia Eudoxia could not.[22]

Galla Placidia also directed a letter to Theodosius' elder sister Pulcheria. Pulcheria, now fifty-one years old, had steered the imperial family and its ecclesiastical policy in Theodosius' younger years, but had been forced by Theodosius' chamberlain Chrysaphius to retreat to the Hebdomen palace outside Constantinople in AD 441 or 446.[23] According to Kenneth Holum, Chrysaphius even dictated Theodosius' negative answers to his family, but Volker L. Menze has recently demonstrated that there is no contemporary evidence that Theodosius' theological policy was determined by Chrysaphius.[24] Although scholars disagree on Pulcheria's actual political power,[25] it is clear from Leo's letters that she was a fervent theological ally of Bishop Leo even before AD 449.[26] This coincides with the public role of both Galla Placidia and Pulcheria in imperial self-representation: like Constantine's mother Helena and other imperial women before them, it was their task to promote an image of imperial holiness.[27] They did this, however, in the context of and together with their family, since the power of these imperial women was closely tied to the power of their male counterparts.

Apart from the individual interests of the Western imperial correspondents, their objectives as a collective should also be taken into account. The Western imperial family had an underlying reason for sending out a batch of four letters repeating the same contents to the East, a strategy described by Andrew Gillett as "multiple communication".[28] In fact, these letters were written at a crucial moment in Valentinian's reign: on 22 February 450, after almost twenty-five years of governing mostly from Ravenna,[29] he

[22] *Cf.* Joyce E. Salisbury, *Rome's Christian Empress: Galla Placidia Rules at the Twilight of the Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 126.

[23] AD 446: Eduard Schwartz, "Der Prozess des Eutyches," SBAW.PH 5 (1929): 55-56; AD 441: Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 91 and 191-192.

[24] Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 205; Volker-Lorenz Menze, *Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria: The Last Pharaoh and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Later Roman Empire*, OECS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 144-45.

[25] Kenneth Holum (cited above), Richard Burgess, and Anja Busch all attribute substantial power to Pulcheria in the period before her marriage to Theodosius' successor Marcian in the summer of 450. Burgess, "Accession of Marcian," 64; Anja Busch, *Die Frauen der theodosianischen Dynastie* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015), 134. Against the Theodosian women excercising *independent* political power: Pfeilschifter, *Kaiser und Konstantinopel,* 491 n. 93.

[26] *ACO* II.4, 14.10-11 (no. 11; Leo to Pulcheria, June 16, 449): *... sicut sancto studio tuo catholica praedicatio semper adiuta est ...* Trans. NPNF 2nd ser. vol. 12: "(...) as the preaching of the catholic Faith has always been aided by your holy zeal (...)." Leo, *ep.* 31. *Cf.* Schwartz, "Der Prozess," 93 and Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 203.

[27] Sivan, *Galla Placidia,* 140; Jill Harries, "Men Without Women: Theodosius' Consistory and the Business of Government," in *Theodosius II. Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, ed. Christopher Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 67-89 at 70.

[28] Gillett, "Lateral Communication," 271, naming this specific case "multiple royal-family-to-royal-family-communication," a strategy that would be imitated by sixth-century Western royal families. On the difference between "batches" and "dossiers": Gillett, "Lateral Communication," 260-261. *Cf.* Hillner, "Female Voice," 353, 356, and 359-361.

[29] Mark Humphries, "Valentinian III and the City of Rome (425-55): Patronage, Politics, Power," in *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lucy Grig and Gavin Kelly, OSLA (Oxford:

moved to Rome and would stay there for the remaining five years of his life, until his assassination on 16 March 455.[30] As Mark Humphries argues, "Rome became once more under Valentinian III (...) the center of power (...)."[31] The arrival of the Western imperial family in Rome was therefore an event charged with great symbolical power: the Western Roman emperor had regained Rome.[32] The imperial visit to the church of Saint Peter on the Saint's name day hence proved an excellent opportunity not only for Leo to perform his petition, and for the Western court to strengthen its ties with the bishop of Rome,[33] but also for the Western imperial family to communicate a message of piety and power to the East. Their gathering with Christ's right hand Peter represented an apostolic authority which Constantinople could only wish to possess.[34] Thanks to the apostolic see, the Western imperial family could compete as a collective with Theodosius over the interpretation of orthodoxy, closely connected to the imperial ideal of unity. After all, it was the Christian unity that had been in danger since Eutyches had first been deposed in AD 448 and then reinstated at the Second Council of Ephesus almost a year later. By writing to Theodosius on behalf of Leo and the Western bishops who had gathered in Rome for a local synod, and composing four separate yet repetitive letters,[35] the Western imperial court created a strong message of Western unity to a religiously divided Constantinople. By lining up with Leo, bishop of the once again imperial Rome, Valentinian and his women found a powerful means to compete with the power of Theodosius' bulwark in the East, and thus to convince the latter of their importance.

2. Contents and rhetoric of the imperial family letters

By and large, the four Western entreaties to Theodosius and Pulcheria contain the same narrative. After a formal greeting, all family members announce their happy arrival in Rome, followed by a description of the scene in the church of Saint Peter. They describe Leo's dramatic plea and then introduce their own requests by providing a moral reason for them. The contents of these requests are also more or less the same: Valentinian, Galla Placidia and Licinia Eudoxia all wish for the case of Flavian to be judged anew by a general council to be held in Italy under Leo's presidency. To substantiate these requests, however, each letter provides its own arguments. This section discusses the letters as couples: every petition is compared with its response from Theodosius, so that the

Oxford University Press, 2012), 162; before February 450, Valentinian was in Rome from 23 October 425 until 24 February 426, between 24 January and 20 March 440, and from 18 January 445 to 3 June 447. This accumulates to a total of three years and one month.

[30] *Cf.* Andrew Gillett, "Rome, Ravenna and the Last Western Emperors," *PBSR* 69 (2001): 142-147.

[31] Humphries, "Valentinian III," 179.

[32] *Cf.* Gillett, "Last Western Emperors," 147: "The move in 450 was perhaps flagged, through ceremonial, as definitive." *Idem* Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, 55.

[33] Sivan, *Galla Placidia,* 141.

[34] *Cf.* Pigott, *New Rome,* 116 on the competitive efforts of Pulcheria and Theodosius' wife Aelia Eudocia to bring the relics of the martyr Saint Stephen to Constantinople, which would grant Constantinople a higher spiritual status.

[35] *Cf.* Sivan, *Galla Placidia,* 138: "Repetition proved essential."

rhetorical differences between the individual family members are clarified. Thus, it illuminates how each member of the Theodosian family made use of the culturally streamlined format of the entreaty to enhance his or her own power.

Valentinian, in his letter to his senior co-emperor and cousin, invokes the following sources of authority to back up his request: consensus, tradition, God's design, the rhetoric of legal petitions, and most importantly, the judicial authority of the Roman bishop. First of all, Valentinian presents Leo's request as a group petition from Leo and the other Italian bishops and underlines their consensus. What is more, he attaches the acts of the bishops to his own letter, which thus is essentially a cover letter for the decisions of the Italian bishops. This reinforces Valentinian's self-representation as a humble and pious son, who appears merely to report the wishes of a higher spirtual authority. However, it is precisely this discourse of humility giving Valentinian the power to compete with Theodosius for the authority to steer Christian orthodoxy.[36] Secondly, Valentinian generalizes the subject of Leo's plea to "the faith, which is said to be disturbed."[37] Thus, he elevates the case of Flavian to a matter of central importance, also invoking the authority of tradition to substantiate his request: in his view, the Roman emperors share the duty to defend the traditional faith as "transmitted by our forefathers".[38] Thirdly, he states that the new judgment given by Leo will be inspired by "the true Deity", which implies divine support for the future council.[39] Apart from constructing the highest possible authority for Leo's future council, these arguments simultanously attack the authority of the Second Council of Ephesus, which Theodosius had personally convened and approved.

Valentinian's core request explicitly states how he is presenting a "request" *(petitio)* to Theodosius, thus deliberately adopting the rhetoric of legal petitions.[40] Although the term he uses, *petitio*, does not literally translate to "petition" in the legal sense,[41] Valentinian's statement that he is making a request activates the cultural script of entreaties. As Peter Van Nuffelen has explained, this script is governed by the expectation to act according to justice.[42] Thus, although Valentinian was Theodosius' colleague and at least in name held equal legislative authority, he presents himself here as a subordinate who is asking the Eastern emperor for a normative response. This creates additional pressure for Theodosius, who holds the moral responsibility to handle requests according to justice.[43] Valentinian hence abstains from invoking his own *imperium*, exploiting instead his son-father

[36] *Cf.* Christopher Kelly, "Stooping to Conquer: The Power of Imperial Humility," in *Theodosius II: Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, ed. Christopher Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 221–43.

[37] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.4-5 (L19): *... fide, quae ... dicitur perturbata ...*

[38] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.5-7 (L19): *... a nostris maioribus traditam ...*

[39] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.16-17 (L19): *... verae divinitatis ...*

[40] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.13-17 (L19): *... ad tuam mansuetudinem meam petitionem ingererem ...* "... I present my request to Your Clemency: ..."

[41] *Cf.* Peter Riedlberger, *Prolegomena zu den spätantiken Konstitutionen nebst einer Analyse der erbrechtlichen und verwandten Sanktionen gegen Heterodoxe* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Verlag Friedrich Frommann, Günther Holzboog, 2020), 27.

[42] Van Nuffelen, *Performing Justice*, chapter 2 ("Interpretations of justice").

[43] *Cf.* Van Nuffelen, *Performing Justice*.

relationship with his senior colleague Theodosius which creates a moral pressure to grant his request.

Finally and crucially, Valentinian defends the judicial authority of Bishop Leo, because tradition has granted him "the position and the power to judge about the faith and the bishops."[44] A personal appeal to Theodosius ("most holy master, father and venerable emperor") marks this statement as the central message of Valentinian's letter.[45] An additional reason for Leo's appellate authority, Valentinian argues, is the fact that Bishop Flavian of Constantinople has sent a written appeal *(libellus)* to Bishop Leo after having been condemned by the Second Council of Ephesus.[46] Finally, Valentinian emphasizes Leo's privileged connection with God.[47]

Unfortunately for Leo and Flavian, Valentinian's letter proved to be not as persuasive as hoped for. Theodosius' short negative reply employs the same rhetorical language as Valentinian, yet manipulates it to serve the opposite purpose. First of all, the emperors agree upon the importance of tradition, especially the part of it transmitted to them by imperial succession. But whereas Valentinian urged Theodosius to defend the faith "transmitted by our forefathers," the latter states that he does not deviate from "the paternal religion or the tradition of the forefathers."[48] Secondly, both emperors express a sense of responsibility for the order in the churches: Theodosius paraphrases Valentinian's urging "to safeguard as inviolate" *(intemeratam ... conservare)* with his own "to preserve inviolately" *(inviolabiliter custodire)*.[49] Significantly, however, Valentinian's object of conservation is the authority of the Roman bishop, while Theodosius wishes to preserve "the doctrine of the Fathers" *(sacramenta paterna),* thus repeating his rhetoric on the centrality of the Nicene Creed.[50] In Theodosius' view, nothing has been done "contrary to the rule of faith or to justice."[51] Moreover, he expands this rhetoric to the ultimate goal of safeguarding peace, concord and truth. At the end of his letter, he writes that thanks to

[44] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.9 (L19): *...locum ... ac facultatem de fide et sacerdotibus iudicare...*

[45] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.9-10 (L19): *... domine sacratissime pater et venerabilis imperator.*

[46] Flavian's appeal has been preserved in the *Collectio Novariensis de re Eutychis*, a letter collection possibly created by Leo himself around AD 449-450. *ACO* II.2.1, 77.8-79.15 (*CNE* 11).

[47] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.16-17 (L19).

[48] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.5 (L19): *a nostris maioribus traditam. ACO* II.3.1, 16.4 (L22): *paterna religione et maiorum traditione.*

[49] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.7 (L19); *ACO* II.3.1, 16.5-6 (L22).

[50] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.5 (L22). On the fifth-century reception of Nicaea *cf.* Mark S. Smith, *The Idea of Nicaea in the Early Church Councils, AD 431-451*, OECS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). I thank Mary Farag for this insight. Theodosius' earlier expressions of wishing to preserve Nicaea can be found for example in *ACO* II.1.1, 73.28-29 (Theodosius' letter to the Second Council of Ephesus from March 30, 449): … πεπεισμένοι ἀρκεῖν ἡμῖν τὴν παραδοθεῖσαν παρὰ τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων τῶν ἐν Νικαίαι ὀρθόδοξον πίστιν … Tr. Price & Gaddis, *Acts* vol. 1, 139 (session 1.51): "(…) in our conviction that the orthodox creed which the holy fathers at Nicaea handed down (…) satisfies our needs."

[51] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.10 (L22): *... contrarium regulae fidei aut iustitiae ...* On the definition and history of the "rule of faith" as distinct from a creed *cf.* Everett Ferguson, *The Rule of Faith: A Guide* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

Flavian's exile, "complete peace and complete concord reign in the churches and nothing other than the truth flourishes."[52]

The third similarity between the two emperors is their strategic dependency in ecclesiastical matters on the acts of the bishops. Just like Valentinian, Theodosius uses the figure of Leo to cope with the most delicate parts of his communica-tion with his cousin and son-in-law. At the start of his letter, Theodosius affirms what he has learned from Valentinian, namely that the latter has come to Rome (an important event, as explained in the first section) and has received a petition *from Leo.* Hence, unlike Valentinian's presentation, who explicitly formulated his request as *his own* petition, Theodosius frames it as coming from the Roman bishop instead of from his cousin.[53] He also strategically rejects it as such. Moreover, he explicitly bypasses Valentinian by stating that he has already discussed the matter with Bishop Leo, who allegedly has recognized the emperor's orthodoxy.[54] This is a very convenient but counterfactual inter-pretation of Leo's letters to Theodosius.[55] Above all, it is an effective strategy to avoid any further interference of his Western family with his theological policy. Besides, Theodosius does not base his judgement on his own authority. He explains that the Second Council of Ephesus has restored order in the churches "thanks to the presence of the most reverend bishops,"[56] and that its outcome has been reached "with much freedom and

[52] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.12-13 (L22): *... omnis pax et omnis concordia regnat in ecclesiis et nihil aliud quam veritas viget.*

[53] However, Theodosius' description of Leo, in his answers to Valentinian and Galla Placidia, as a "patriarch" *(patriarcha)* could have been chosen to discredit Leo's claim to Petrine authority, because it degrades him to the same level as the bishops of Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople. Blaudeau, "L'évêque de Rome Léon," under *Le refus de Théodose II,* citing Erich Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums von den Anfängen bis zur Höhe der Weltherrschaft*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1930), 499 n. 5.

[54] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.2-4 (L22): *de his autem quae dixit memoratus reverendissimus vir, indicatum est ad eundem latius atque plenius, sicut arbitrati sumus, et agnovit nos in nulla parte a paterna religione et maiorum traditione resilisse.* My translation: "(...) as to these things, however, which the aforementioned most reverend man has spoken, it was advisable to discuss them more amply and fully, as we judged, and he has acknowledged that we did not deviate from the paternal religion or the tradition of the forefathers in any way."

[55] On October 13, 449, Leo indeed praised Theodosius' "defence of truth and peace", but then filled the rest of his epistle describing how by the Second Council of Ephesus "the whole mystery of the Christian Faith is absolutely destroyed." Tr. NPNF 2nd ser. vol. 12, 53 (Leo, *ep*. 44). *ACO* II.4, 19.15 (no. 18): ... *defendendae per vos veritatis et pacis* ... Tr. NPNF 2nd ser. vol. 12, 53 (Leo, *ep*. 44). *ACO* II.4, 20.9-10 (no. 18): ... *omne Christianae fidei sacramentum ... exscinditur* ... In another letter to Theodosius, from December 25, 449, Leo repeated his wish to undo Ephesus II (*ACO* II.4, 11.11-29). Nevertheless, the next and last time that Leo would write to Theodosius, on July 16, 450, he stated that "all your Piety's letters have indeed given us the greatest hope of security through your support of the Council of Nicaea to the extent that you do not permit the bishops of the Lord to deviate from it, as you have often said in letters." *ACO* II.4, 30.21-24 (no. 30): *Omnibus quidem vestrae pietatis epistulis (...) spem securitatis nobis maximam praestistis Nicaenum commendando concilium adeo ut ab illo, sicut saepe iam scribitis, non patiamini sacerdotes domini deviare; ...* Tr. Hunt, *Letters,* 137 (Leo, *ep*. 69). However, given Leo's continued opposition to the Second Council of Ephesus, it is more likely that Leo's praise here is consciously limited to Theodosius' support of Nicaea. Meanwhile, Leo's explicit approval of Ephesus II in any of his unpreserved letters is rather inconceivable.

[56] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.7-8 (L22): *... praesentia ... reverendissimorum episcoporum ...*

impartial truth" by the participating bishops.[57] Thus, the emperor denies any direct responsibility for the outcomes of Ephesus II. Instead, he contends that everything has been examined "by a holy judgement" *(sacro iudicio)*,[58] hereby also insinuating that there is no room for Leo's appellate authority: in Theodosius' view, God has already manifested His truth at the Second Council of Ephesus.

The mirrored rhetoric of Valentinian and Theodosius reveals how they both manipulate their shared cultural framework of decision making in order to enhance their own power.[59] It also shows how this 'culture of entreaty' not only governs the rhetoric of entreaties, as Van Nuffelen argues, but also that of their replies. Even though Theodosius denies Valentinian's request, he has to perform his scripted role and argue why the same indicators of justice lead to the opposite outcome, which he does by stressing the authority of the Second Council of Ephesus. Since it was not possible for the two emperors to disagree on the parameters of justice, they could only reach opposite conclusions by interpreting the relative authority of the bishops differently. Valentinian favours Leo as the privileged bishop of Rome, whereas Theodosius chooses the side of the bishops at the Second Council of Ephesus (directed by Bishop Dioscorus of Alexandria). What is more, Theodosius also claims Leo's support for his own position.[60]

Galla Placidia's letter to Theodosius is more strongly worded than her son's epistle, both in its use of pathos and in its rhetoric of authority.[61] Placidia's vivid description of the scene in Saint Peter's basilica includes an account of how Leo was "blending tears with words" and thus also caused herself to cry.[62] This shared weeping symbolizes the bond between the Western court and Leo, while also reinforcing Galla Placidia's own public image of piety. Also, as Julia Hillner has demonstrated, the heightened pathos in this letter indicates the "artificial construction of a female voice."[63] Like Valentinian, Placidia emphasizes the number of bishops accompanying Leo and their widespread origin, but most of all their reason for convening in Rome: they had come to Leo "because of the highest position *(principatus)* or dignity of this specific place."[64] Unlike her son, Galla

[57] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.7-8 (L22): *... cum multa libertate et integra veritate ...*

[58] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.10 (L22).

[59] *Cf.* Van Nuffelen, *Performing Justice*, chapter 2.

[60] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.4 (L22).

[61] Hillner, "Female Voice," 359-360. *Cf.* Blaudeau, "L'évêque de Rome Léon," under *Une réelle promotion de la* sedes apostolica.

[62] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.28 (L20): *... verbis permiscens lacrimas ...*

[63] Hillner, "Female Voice," 368. I do not see, however, why Hillner excludes Galla Placidia's letter to Pulcheria from this "female style of expression," since it contains even more pathos than her letter to Theodosius, e.g.: "And because of his sadness, that was interspersed with weeping, he almost could not express his desire with words (…)." *ACO* II.3.1, 13.9-10 (L18): *qui propter interpositam gemitus sui tristitiam desiderium paene suum verbis insinuare non poterat, ...* My translation. Nevertheless, the perceived femininity of these descriptions can be nuanced by comparing them with Leo's own words in his letter to Theodosius from October 13, 449: "(…) all the churches in our area, all the bishops, entreat your Benevolence with groans and tears to (…) order the holding of a general council in Italy." *ACO* II.4, 20.28-31 (no. 18): *omnes mansuetudini vestrae cum gemitibus et lacrimis supplicant sacerdotes ut ... generalem synodum iubeatis intra Italiam celebrari ...* Tr. Hunt, *Letters,* 126.

[64] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.27 (L20): *... pro principatu proprii loci seu dignitate ...*

Placidia hence connects the authority of the apostolic see to the position of Rome *as a city*. She does this most notably in her core request to Theodosius, where she describes Rome as "the mistress of the whole world."[65]

Besides mentioning the superiority of Rome, Galla Placidia also invokes the power of tradition. She warns Theodosius that Dioscorus' actions at Ephesus II have disturbed the rules of Constantine, "who was the first with imperial power *(imperium)* to shine as a Christian."[66] With this argument, Galla Placidia emphasizes the overriding authority of Theodosius' predecessors. Moreover, by referring to Constantine and her own generation, Galla Placidia's words invoke the hierarchy of age and, as Blaudeau has convincingly argued, dynastic tradition.[67] Thus she creates an image of superiority over her nephew. Indeed, it is thanks to the rhetorical invocation of this other hierarchy that Galla Placidia can end her letter with an admonition, warning Theodosius not to diminish "what our generation in earlier times has preserved," and that, perhaps even more importantly, "by the present example no schisms may be generated between the bishops and the holy churches."[68] With this final warning, Galla Placidia attacks the principle of unity so essential to Theodosius' imperial policy.[69] This is her strongest rhetorical weapon: in her depiction of the events, the Western court and clergy are united in faith, whereas Theodosius is condoning violence at his Church councils and even generating discord in the Church as a whole.[70]

Theodosius' answer to Galla Placidia reveals that he takes his aunt's cautions seriously. His first sentence already implies equality of power:

> "From the letter of Your Clemency Our Eternity has learned what the most reverend patriarch Leo has asked from Your Eternity." [71]

By employing the same term for himself and his aunt ("Eternity", *aeternitas),* Theodosius insinuates they are on the same level of authority. Moreover, he does not dodge Galla Placidia's statements by referring to his correspondence with Leo, as he has done with Valentinian (and Licinia Eudoxia, see below), but instead formulates a defense of his actions. He does this, first of all, by placing the Second Council of Ephesus on the same normative level as Constantine's Council of Nicaea.[72] Secondly, Theodosius derives the authority of Ephesus II from the participating bishops, who in his words expelled Flavian "by a holy sentence" *(sacra sententia)*.[73] His third argument is an appeal to the

[65] *ACO* II.3.1, 15.7 (L20): *...domina omnium ... terrarum ...* Likewise Blaudeau, "L'évêque de Rome Léon," under *Différences au sujet de la signification symbolique de la cité de Rome.*

[66] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.31 (L20): *... qui primus imperio splenduit Christianus ...*

[67] Blaudeau, "L'évêque de Rome Léon," under *Une véritable généalogie constantinienne.* Besides, Blaudeau rightly remarks that this dynastic affection is also invoked by Galla Placidia's use of *mater / filius / filia* in both her letters to Theodosius and Pulcheria.

[68] *ACO* II.3.1, 15.8-10 (L20): *...ne quod priscis temporibus nostra generatio custodivit ... et per praesens exemplum schismata generentur inter episcopos ac sanctas ecclesias.*

[69] Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, 51.

[70] Galla Placidia on the violence at Ephesus II: *ACO* II.3.1, 14.33 (L20).

[71] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.15-17 (L23): *Ex litteris tuae mansuetudinis nostra cognovit aeternitas quid reverentissimus patriarcha Leo a tua aeternitate poposcerit.*

[72] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.19-22 (L23).

[73] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.26 (L23).

shared cultural framework of decision making, similar to his letter to Valentinian, explaining that the bishops have made their decisions "for concord and a pure bond with the honourable religion."[74] He concludes his letter with an imperative rebuttal of Galla Placidia's threat about tradition:

> "(...) do not suspect or think that we ever judge anything contrary to the traditional faith, as is being told by some."[75]

Here, Theodosius stresses that his defense should suffice to convince his aunt of his orthodoxy. What is more, he also diminishes her accusations by portraying them as mere gossip: "as is being told by some" *(sicut a quibusdam dicitur).* With this final sentence, Theodosius not only acquits himself, but also assumes the highest authority to make decisions. Even though Galla Placidia was from an older generation, and whatever she might state about the status of Rome (which Theodosius wisely ignored),[76] it was the Eastern emperor who could judge *(sentire)* about the faith by convening Church councils. Since Theodosius also argues that his Second Council of Ephesus holds the same authority as Constantine's Council of Nicaea, he thus reverses the hierarchy invoked by Galla Placidia: she is not superior to her nephew, because he and his council hold equal authority to that of their common ancestors.

The correspondence between Licinia Eudoxia and Theodosius may at first sight only seem to express the wishes of a spoiled daughter, but in fact illustrates how Licinia Eudoxia strengthens her own position by manipulating her culturally scripted role in relation to her father. Licinia's letter is characterized by a praising introduction and an emphasis on the persuasive force of her own writing. First of all, she purposefully exploits her father's goodwill by stating that "[i]t is known to all that Your Mildness has care and solicitude for the Christians and the catholic faith (...)."[77] By describing how she has "happily" *(feliciter)* entered Rome, she marks the political importance of this event. Notably, Licinia does not go into detail about the case itself: she merely asks for a council in Italy. Most relevant for the present analysis is the precise wording of Licinia's core request:

> "(...) and he [i.e. Leo] desired (...) that I would direct my letter on this case to Your Clemency, most holy master, father and adorable emperor. So because I welcome what is just, I demand that because of this letter Your Tranquillity may deign to grant

[74] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.24-25 (L23): *... ad concordiam et purum vinculum adorandae religionis ...*

[75] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.26-29 (L23): *... nihil nos aliquando contrarium a tradita fide sentire, sicut a quibusdam dicitur, suspicemini aut cogitetis.*

[76] Blaudeau, "L'évêque de Rome Léon," under *Le refus de Théodose II,* also notes that Theodosius ignored Galla Placidia's claims to her Constantine lineage by addressing her with a shortened title (omitting *Galla). ACO* II.3.1, 16.15: *Dominae meae Placidiae venerabili augustae Theodosius.* My translation: "To my Mistress Placidia venerable *augusta*, Theodosius."

[77] *ACO* II.3.1, 15.13-14 (L21): *Omnibus notum est tuam mansuetudinem curam atque sollicitudinem habere Christianorum et catholicae fidei ...*

> [the request] and may order that those things that have been acted badly will be corrected, (...)."[78]

Here, Licinia emphasizes that it is *her letter* that should convince the "adorable emperor" *(adorabilis imperator)*. Her father is to grant Leo's request "because of this letter" *(his litteris)*. Either Licinia was used to get anything she desired from her father in Constantinople, or she was acutely aware that this personal appeal was her only possible source of influence over Theodosius. Given her position as a woman and daughter, a substantive argumentation was not in place. Therefore, Licinia chose to play the expected role of the affectionate daughter, but used it for pressuring Theodosius to act as a benign and loving father.

"Of course we always delight in the letters of your desire and we embrace them with the full sweetness of our soul and we are used to grant all your requests with pleasure," Theodosius replies.[79] Despite this taking up of his expected role as Licinia's loving father, he explains as briefly as he can that the case of Flavian is none of her business: he has already discussed the matter with Bishop Leo himself. The only thing his daughter should know is that Flavian "was banned from public life by a holy judgment (...) and that it is not possible to determine anything more after this, because these things have been decided once and for all."[80] This answer from Theodosius is not only remarkable because of its decisive and fatherly tone, it also distills the core of his argumentation from his more elaborate replies to his other family members: Flavian's condemnation is the result of a "holy sentence". Hence, regardless of his own imperial power, Theodosius bases his decision to uphold the decisions made at the Second Council of Ephesus on the authority of the participating council bishops and ultimately God. What is at stake here is the competition between East and West for imperial piety: with this narrative, Theodosius claims ownership of God's approval and hence of the public image of the pious emperor.

The final letter under discussion is Galla Placidia's letter to Pulcheria, Theodosius' fifty-one-year-old elder sister. It stands apart not only because of the gender of sender and recipient,[81] but also since Galla Placidia approaches Pulcheria not as a reluctant superior but as a pious ally, or even an inferior. This already is apparent in the letter's greeting, which inverses the order of names, placing Galla Placidia before Pulcheria and describes them both as "most pious" *(piissima)*.[82] Next to that, instead of underlining the civil power of Rome, Galla Placidia emphasizes the law and order of the Church – contrasting this with the disorder at the Second Council of Ephesus.[83] To Pulcheria she explains her visit

[78] *ACO* II.3.1, 15.21-25 (L21): *et hoc ... postulavit ... quatenus ad tuam clementiam ex hac causa meas litteras destinarem, domine sacratissime pater et adorabilis imperator. salutans igitur iusta posco quatenus his litteris curam vestra tranquillitas praebere dignetur et quae male gesta sunt, emendari praecipiat ...*

[79] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.31-33 (L24): *Semper equidem tui desiderii litteris delectamur et has tota animae suavitate complectimur et omnibus tuis petitionibus consuevimus gratanter annuere, ...*

[80] *ACO* II.3.1, 17.3-6 (L24): *...sacro iudicio ab humanis rebus ablatus est, ... et nihil ulterius post haec definire possibile est, cum iam semel ista decisa sint.*

[81] *Cf.* Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, 37.

[82] *ACO* II.3.1, 13.2 (L18).

[83] Hillner, "Female Voice," 360-61 suggests that Placidia is giving more "open criticism" on Theodosius in this letter than in the one sent to Theodosius himself, but I disagree: to Theodosius as well, Placidia describes the happenings at Ephesus II as "so much disturbance" *(tantis turbis)*. *ACO* II.3.1, 15.1 (L20).

to Rome entirely from a religious viewpoint: she came to Rome because she felt the moral imperative to venerate the saints' holidays.[84] Thus, Galla Placidia showcases her own piety to the devoted Pulcheria. She does not emphasize Leo's judicial authority, because there is no need to convince Pulcheria on this point. Besides, this argumentation may have been more effective with the actual ruler, Theodosius.[85] Instead, Galla Placidia elaborates on Leo's pathos and his position as the defender of orthodoxy, thus revealing her awareness of Pulcheria's support for Leo. Her core message to Pulcheria is that their common faith has been disturbed. Accordingly, she asks Pulcheria for her continued cooperation.[86]

Galla Placidia clearly expects Pulcheria's support for "pope Leo".[87] The contents of her request are the same as in her entreaty to Theodosius, which indicates great trust in Pulcheria's political influence. Perhaps Galla Placidia foresaw that her niece in Constantinople would indeed be capable of overturning the theological policy of the Eastern Empire. Before that could happen, however, Theodosius would have to pass away.

3. Imperial versus episcopal rhetoric of authority

The letters written by the Western imperial family were not the first step in the negotiation process between Leo and Theodosius. Before choosing the detour of indirect lobbying, Leo had already written personally to Theodosius and Pulcheria and other influential figures in Constantinople soon after the Second Council of Ephesus, which took place in the summer of 449.[88] This section compares the rhetoric of authority of the imperial family letters to Theodosius with that of Leo's letters to Theodosius and Pulcheria from 13 October and 25 December 449, in order to determine the extent to which the imperial letter writers chose their own arguments.

As mentioned in the first section, Leo's initial reaction to the Second Council of Ephesus had been to convene a local Roman synod. Together with that synod, he petitioned both Theodosius and Pulcheria for a new Church council in Italy, emphasizing the importance of his *Tome*. Leo's *Tome* was a doctrinal letter intended to determine the decision-making at the Second Council of Ephesus; there, however, it had been ignored. To Theodosius, Leo underlined the judicial authority of the apostolic see and the subordination of the emperor to God,[89] whereas Pulcheria received a reminder of her continued support for the Church in general.[90] More specifically, Leo based his judicial authority on three arguments: the opposition of his delegates during the Second Council of Ephesus, Flavian's written appeal to Leo, and the decrees of Nicaea. However, what Leo attached

[84] *ACO* II.3.1, 13.6-7 (L18).

[85] I thank Philippe Blaudeau for this insight.

[86] *ACO* II.3.1, 13.20-21 (L18).

[87] *ACO* II.3.1, 13.8 (L18): *... Leo papa ...*

[88] *ACO* II.4, 19.11-26.4 (nos. 18-24); *ACO* II.4, 11.11-29 (no. 9).

[89] Judicial authority: *ACO* II.4, 20.29-30 and 21.1-3 (no. 18); the emperor's subordination: *ACO* II.4, 20.18-19 (no. 18).

[90] *ACO* II.4, 24.32-25.1 (no. 23).

to his letter as a canon from the famous and widely accepted Council of Nicaea (AD 325), was actually the fourth canon of the Council of Serdica (AD 342) that had not even been accepted in the East.[91] When after two months Theodosius still failed to reply,[92] Leo dispatched a short note which again asked for a new council, this time merely based on the authority of Nicaea.[93] Here it is argued that the Western imperial family members did not simply copy Leo's argumentation. Instead, they added arguments on the authority of Rome which potentially enhanced their own social power.

By and large, Valentinian, Galla Placidia and Licinia Eudoxia followed the narrative of Leo's correspondence: they all abhorred what happend at the Second Council of Ephesus and asked for a new council in Italy. Next to that, the three Western imperial entreaties derived some specific arguments from Leo, for example his emphasis on the number of bishops supporting him in his request *(cf.* table 1). Valentinian and Galla Placidia also followed Leo in his argumentation about his appellate authority, and in omitting this argument when approaching Pulcheria. Moreover, both Valentinian and Galla Placidia repeated Leo's rhetoric on the importance of tradition as established by their forefathers, and the emphatic wish not to deviate from this tradition "in our times". However, in both her letters to Theodosius and Pulcheria, Galla Placidia added the crucial detail that this tradition was established by Constantine. She thus strategically referred to the importance for Christian emperors, and Theodosius in particular, to emulate his famous predecessor, hereby also reinforcing her own public image of piety.[94] Besides, the imperial petitioners put less emphasis on the authority of Christ and the importance of unity in the Church – nor did they follow Leo in alluding to his spiritual superiority to Theodosius. Significantly, they did not mention Leo's *Tome*, which for Leo was a crucial part of his argumentation. These differences, especially the last one, indicate a difference of interest between the Western imperial court and Leo. Contrary, then, to what Jalland and Wessel have argued, the Western imperial family did not slavishly follow Leo's arguments.[95]

[91] *ACO* II.1.1, 4.32-38 (M1). *Cf.* NPNF 2nd ser. vol. 12 (Feltoe 1895), 54 n. 9a; Schwartz 1931, 33-35.

[92] *Contra* Horn, *Petrou Kathedra,* 108, who argues that Theodosius *did* reply to Leo, because the emperor argued this in his reply to Valentinian. Horn's other proof for this is Leo's assertion from 6 July 450 that Theodosius has written "often already" *(saepe iam)* on his wish to preserve the Nicene faith. *ACO* II.4, 30.23 (no. 30). However, both Theodosius and Leo had political reasons for implying frequent correspondence between them. Moreover, these references do not conclusively demonstrate the existence of a letter sent from Theodosius to Leo before the end of 449.

[93] *ACO* II.4, 11.20-21 (no. 9).

[94] *Cf.* Susan Wessel, "The Ecclesiastical Policy of Theodosius II," *AHC* 33 (2001): 285-308 at 307 (on Theodosius' wish to be a new Constantine).

[95] Trevor Jalland, *The Life and Times of St. Leo the Great* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 266 (acknowledging, however, the originality of the Western imperial argument about the civil power of the city of Rome); Wessel, "Theodosius II," 305.

Table 1: Rhetoric of authority compared

Theme	Argument	Bishop Leo I	Valen-tinian III	Galla Placi-dia	Lici-nia Eu-doxia	Theo-dosius II
RELIGION/GOD	*divinitatis favor*		z			
	peace in the Church	b, c	z			x
	Emperor's need to please God	a, b, c	x		x	
	Judgment Day	a				
	authority of Christ as the Guardian of the Empire	a				
	all apostles + all martyrs	a				
	unity/integrity of the Church	a, b, c				x
DOCTRINE/ COUNCILS = formal procedure	doctrine in general	b				x
	authority of Ephesus II					x
	number of petitioning bishops	a	x	x	x	
	Council of Nicaea in general	c				x
LEO'S APPELLATE AUTHORITY = formal procedure	Leo's appellate authority thanks to Nicaea/ conciliar procedure	a	x	x		
	Flavian's appeal to Leo	a	x	x		
LEO'S THEOLOGICAL AUTHORITY	Leo's *Tome*	a, b				
	Leo's letter to Ephesus II	a, b				

Theme	Argument	Bishop Leo I	Valentinian III	Galla Placidia	Licinia Eudoxia	Theodosius II
PETER/ APOSTOLIC SEE	authority of apostolic see *reverentia/ auctoritas apostolicae sedis*		x, z	x		
	authority of Peter	a, b	x, z	x, y		
ROME	authority of Rome as a city		x, z	x (y)		
	Rome's position thanks to Nicaea + Constantinople		z			
IMPERIAL AUTHORITY	authority of Valentinian's *imperium*		z			
	authority of imperial law	a	z			
TRADITION	habit/ tradition/ *mores*	a	z			x
	forefathers/ ancestors	a	x, z	x		x
	Constantine			x, y		
	"in our times"	a	x	y		
JUSTICE	justice	b	z	y	x	x

a: Leo to Theodosius, 13 October 449
b: Leo to Pulcheria, 13 October 449
c: Leo to Theodosius, 25 December 449

x: correspondence between Theodosius and his family, February 450
y: Galla Placidia to Pulcheria, February 450
z: Nov. Val. 17, 8 July 445

Whereas it was Leo's main goal to advance his *Tome*,[96] I suggest the Western family members had their own agenda: through strengthening Leo's judicial authority, they wished to boost the position of the city of Rome. As argued above, Licinia's arguments

[96] *ACO* II.4, 19.19-20 (no. 18).

were probably aimed at enhancing her personal power, but Valentinian and Galla Placidia explicitly mentioned the authority of Rome as a city. Of course, they derived their arguments about the authority of Peter and therefore the apostolic see directly from Leo, but Leo's correspondence never explicitly mentioned the primacy of Rome.[97] What is more: Leo would not even refer to the position of Rome in his fierce opposition to Chalcedon's canon 28, which granted the See of Constantinople certain jurisdictional privileges, in the years 451 and 452.[98] For Leo, it was more important that the See of Rome would be recognized as the apostolic see and the place of Peter and Paul's martyrdom.[99] This means that Valentinian and Galla Placidia indeed made their own choice to emphasize Rome's primacy, thus probably attempting to enhance the authority of the old imperial city and thus their own position. After all, 22 February 450 marked not just the holiday of Saint Peter, but also the return of the Western imperial government to the city of Rome, where it would stay until Valentinian's death. With their letters to Theodosius, Valentinian and Galla Placidia communicated not only Leo's request, but also their return to a position of power, with Leo as their powerful ecclesiastical ally.

These dynamics had, in fact, already appeared five years earlier, when Valentinian ratified Leo's judgement on Bishop Hilary of Arles in his seventeenth *Novella (cf.* table 1). This law issued by Valentinian on 8 July 445 also mentions "the dignity of the city of Rome" thanks to the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople.[100] Here as well, this argument was not copied from Leo, who had sent his own directive on the case of Bishop Hilary.[101] According to Mark Humphries, the rhetoric of Valentinian's seventeenth *Novella* is more concerned with imperial authority than with Leo's interests.[102] As my analysis has shown, this also applies to the letters from Valentinian, Galla Placidia and Licinia Eudoxia to Theodosius: on the surface, they serve or at least cooperate with Leo, but in their actual argumentation, all Western family members also pursue their own interests.

[97] *Cf.* Horn, *Petrou Kathedra,* 108.

[98] Leo to Anatolius (22 May 452): *ACO* II.4, 59.13-62.12 (no. 56). Leo, *ep*. 106; Leo to Marcian (22 May 452): *ACO* II.4, 55.5-57.16 (no. 54). Leo, *ep*. 104; Leo to the Council of Chalcedon (21 March 453): *ACO* II.4, 70.19-71.22 (no. 64). Leo, *ep*. 114; Leo to Marcian (21 March 453): *ACO* II.4, 67.8-68.12 (no. 61). Leo, *ep*. 115.

[99] I thank Philippe Blaudeau for this insight.

[100] Nov. Val. 17.0: ... *Romanae dignitas civitatis* ... Here, Valentinian refers to the sixth canon of Nicaea, which is not so much concerned with the privileged status of Rome, but rather with that of Alexandria and Antioch. *Cf.* Andreas Weckwerth, "The Twenty Canons of the Council of Nicaea," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Council of Nicaea*, ed. Young Richard Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 158-176.

[101] Leo, *ep.* 10. This is also observed by Blaudeau, "L'évêque de Rome Léon," under *Une documentation remarquable.*

[102] Humphries, "Valentinian III," 169. Still, Blaudeau rightly notes that the similarities between Valentinian's and Leo's correspondence on the case of Hilary indicates the existence of direct contact between their chancelleries. Blaudeau, "L'évêque de Rome Léon," under *Une documentation remarquable.*

4. Conclusions

This article has discussed the entreaties from the Western imperial family to the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II on 22 February 450, and Theodosius' replies. By analyzing the rhetoric of authority of this letter sequence and comparing it with the earlier correspondence of Bishop Leo I to the Eastern imperial court, this article has demonstrated how the involved parties exploited a culturally scripted negotation process to pursue their own goals. From the correspondence of Valentinian III, Galla Placidia and Licinia Eudoxia, it appears that they appropriated the rhetoric of petition by their word choice and their reference to formal procedure, namely Flavians's written appeal to Leo, which gave the latter the authority to judge Flavian's case. They also appealed to the power of tradition. Moreover, all correspondents referred to the same values: they claimed to pursue peace, concord and justice. However, each author manipulated this shared cultural framework of decision making to serve his or her own purposes.

Theodosius managed to use the same types of arguments as his family and yet come to the opposite conclusion thanks to two decisive factors. First of all, he placed the Second Council of Ephesus on the same authoritative level as the widely accepted Council of Nicaea. By emphasizing the power of his Church council to deepen tradition, Theodosius could defend himself against his family's accusations of disrupting the traditional faith. Next to that, he repeatedly stated that the Second Council of Ephesus had passed a "holy judgment". This was Theodosius' strongest and most important argument, as the crucial factor in this battle of words was the proximity to God. Whose authority was closer to the Ultimate Judge, that of the See of Rome or the Eastern emperor's Church council? This delicate question could remain unanswered because Theodosius' second strategy was to also claim the support of Bishop Leo. Thus, all imperial family members rhetorically used Leo to bypass each other's authority, and even to keep silent about their own *imperium*. They hence diplomatically omitted what was actually at stake: the relative power of East and West.

The third section of this article disclosed that Valentinian, Galla Placidia and Licinia Eudoxia did not remain behind the curtains of Leo's argumentation. Instead of merely copying the rhetoric of Leo's own correspondence to Theodosius and Pulcheria, Valentinian and Galla Placidia added some crucial phrases on the importance and authority of the city of Rome. Whereas Valentinian had already emphasized the position of Rome in his seventeenth *Novella* from July 445, Leo had never explicitly mentioned this before, and would not even do so in his later correspondence. This indicates that the entreaties of Valentinian, Galla Placidia and Licinia Eudoxia, albeit prompted and inspired by Leo's affectionate plea, should also be read as testimonies to their individual interests. Both Valentinian and Galla Placidia sought to enhance the status of the old imperial city, to which they had just moved and where they would stay for the remainder of their lives. Licinia Eudoxia, on the other hand, tried to reinforce her personal influence over her usually generous father. Moreover, the Western imperial family acted as a collective to communicate a message of pious unity to Theodosius, thus competing with him over the narrative of Christian orthodoxy and trying to convince him of the political importance of the Western court, located once again in the city of Rome. In sum, the

rhetoric of these entreaties was not dictated by Bishop Leo, nor was their effect supposed to be limited to the case of Bishop Flavian. Consequently, this case study on the function of imperial letters in late antique Christian controversies demonstrates that formal correspondence could be and was effectively used by the correspondents to negotiate their own power, even if they discussed a judgment that ultimately rested in the hands of God.

Marijke Kooijman, "The Theodosian Family, Bishop Leo I of Rome and Their Competition for Piety Through Their Correspondence," *JLARC* 18 (2024) 1-32; https://doi.org/10.18573/jlarc.133

Appendix: translation of the family correspondence

1A. Western Roman emperor Valentinian III to his cousin the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II

Domino meo Theodosio gloriosissimo victori ac triumphatori perpetuo imperatori et patri victor Valentinianus gloriosus [victor] ac triumphator semper augustus et filius. Cum advenissem in urbem Romam ad divinitatem placandam, sequenti die ad basilicam apostoli Petri processi et illic post venerabilem noctem diei apostoli et a Romano episcopo et ab aliis cum eo ex diversis provinciis congregatis rogatus sum scribere vestrae mansuetudini de fide, quae cum sit conservatrix omnium fidelium animarum, dicitur perturbata. quam nos a nostris maioribus traditam debemus cum omni competenti devotione defendere et dignitatem propriae venerationis beato apostolo intemeratam et in nostris temporibus conservare, quatenus beatissimus Romanae civitatis episcopus, cui principatum sacerdotii super omnes antiquitas contulit, locum habeat ac facultatem de fide et sacerdotibus iudicare, domine sacratissime pater et venerabilis imperator. hac enim gratia secundum sollemnitatem conciliorum et Constantinopolitanus episcopus eum per libellos appellavit propter contentionem quae orta est de fide. huic postulanti et coniuranti salutem nostram communem annuere non negavi quatenus ad tuam mansuetudinem meam petitionem ingererem, ut praedictus sacerdos congregatis ex omni orbe etiam reliquis sacerdotibus intra Italiam, omni praeiudicio summoto, a principio omnem causam quae vertitur, sollicita probatione cognoscens sententiam ferat quam fides et ratio verae divinitatis expostulat. non debet enim nostris temporibus atque religione turbarum petulantia praevalere, dum incommota fides hactenus fuerit conservata. ad perfectiorem vero agnitionem vestrae divinitatis direximus etiam gesta, per quae et desideria et exclamationes omnium pietas vestra cognoscat.[103]

To my master Theodosius, most glorious victor and perpetual conqueror, eternal emperor and father, Valentinian, glorious [victor] and conqueror, forever *augustus* and son.

When I had arrived in Rome to appease God, I proceeded on the next day to the basilica of the apostle Peter and there, after the hallowed eve of the apostle's holy day, I was asked by the Roman bishop as well as others who were congregated with him from various provinces, to write to Your Clemency about our faith, which is said to be disturbed, although it is the keeper of the souls of all believers.

That [faith], transmitted by our forefathers, we must defend with all appropriate devotion, and [we must] preserve inviolate the dignity of the veneration appropriate to the apostle Peter in our times as well, since the most blessed bishop of the Roman city, to whom antiquity has granted above everyone else the principate of the episcopate, has the position and the power to judge the faith and the bishops, most holy master, father and venerable emperor. After all, because of this favourable position even the Constantinopolitan bishop [i.e. Flavian] has appealed to him through petitions – following the formal procedure of the councils – on account of the contention that has arisen about the faith.

[103] *ACO* II.3.1, 13.31-14.20 (L19). Greek version in *ACO* II.1.1, 5.6-28 (M2). Leo, *ep.* 55.

And thus I did not refuse this claimant, who also promised under oath our common wellbeing. Consequently, I present my request to Your Clemency: that all bishops throughout the whole world congregate in Italy, that any previous judgment be nullified, and that Bishop Leo investigate afresh the whole case in question with great care and pass the judgment which our faith and the consideration of the true God demand.

For in our times, and especially in religion, the frivolity of the crowd must not prevail, since the faith had been preserved unshaken until now. Still, to provide Your Divinity with a more complete knowledge, we have also sent the acts, through which Your Piety may learn everyone's wishes and their shouts of approval.

1B. Response of the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II to his cousin the Western Roman emperor Valentinian III

Domino meo Valentiniano augusto Theodosius. Et Romae pervenisse tuam mansuetudinem et petitionem oblatam a Leone reverentissimo patriarcha in ipso litterarum textu a tua maiestate significatum est. et de tua quidem incolumi in Romana urbe reversione gratias competentes divinae maiestatis reddidimus, domine sanctissime fili et venerabilis imperator; de his autem quae dixit memoratus reverentissimus vir, indicatum est ad eundem latius atque plenius, sicut arbitrati sumus, et agnovit nos in nulla parte a paterna religione et maiorum traditione resilisse. nihil aliud volumus quam sacramenta paterna per successionem nobis tradita inviolabiliter custodire. propter hanc igitur causam quoniam quosdam agnovimus sanctissimas ecclesias nocibili novitate turbare, synodum decrevimus Ephesi fieri: praesentia quippe reverentissimorum episcoporum cum multa libertate et integra veritate et indigni sacerdotio remoti sunt, et qui iudicati sunt esse digni, suscepti sunt. nihil igitur ab his contrarium regulae fidei aut iustitiae factum esse cognovimus. omnis igitur contentio sacro iudicio examinata est; Flavianus autem, qui reus inventus est laesibilis novitatis, debitum recepit et hoc remoto omnis pax et omnis concordia regnat in ecclesiis et nihil aliud quam veritas viget.[104]

To my master Valentinian *augustus*, Theodosius. Both that Your Clemency arrived in Rome and that a request was presented by Leo, the most reverend patriarch, has been notified by Your Majesty in the personal text of your letter. And surely we have given thanks to the Divine Majesty because of your safe return to the Roman city, most holy master, son and venerable emperor. As to these things, however, which the aforementioned most reverend man has spoken, it was advisable to discuss them more amply and fully, as we judged, and he has acknowledged that we did not deviate from the paternal religion or the tradition of the forefathers in any way.

We want nothing else than to preserve inviolately the doctrine of the Fathers that has been transmitted to us through succession. For this reason, therefore, because we

[104] *ACO* II.3.1, 15.30-16.13 (L22). Greek version in *ACO* II.1.1, 7.4-24 (M5). Also partially translated from the Greek by Jalland, *St. Leo the Great,* 264-5 (14.5-9 *quam ... iudicare)* and from the Latin by Wessel, *Leo the Great,* 266 n. 29 (16.4-6 *nihil ... custodire).*

acknowledged that the most holy churches were in disorder because of a harmful innovation, we decreed that there would be a synod in Ephesus: as you know, thanks to the presence of the most reverend bishops, with much freedom and impartial truth both those unworthy for the episcopate were removed, and those who were judged worthy, accepted.

So we have understood that nothing was done by these [bishops] contrary to the rule of faith or to justice. Therefore, all contention has been examined by a holy judgment. Flavian, however, who was found guilty of a harmful innovation, has received his debt and, thanks to his exile, complete peace and complete concord reign in the churches, and nothing other than the truth flourishes.

2A. Western Roman empress-mother Galla Placidia to her nephew the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II

Domino victori Theodosio triumphatori semper augusto filio Galla Placidia piissima et perpetua augusta mater. Dum in ipso ingressu civitatis antiquae hanc curam habuissemus ut cultum beato Petro apostolo redderemus, in ipso adorando altari martyris reverentissimus Leo episcopus, paululum se post orationem retinens, propter catholicam fidem apud nos deflevit, ipsum similiter summum apostolorum, quem nuper adieramus, testem obiciens, episcoporum multitudine circumsaeptus, quos ex innumerabilibus civitatibus Italiae pro principatu proprii loci seu dignitate collegit, et verbis permiscens lacrimas ad communionem sui fletus nostros quoque gemitus provocavit. non modicum detrimentum est ex his quae gesta sunt, ut fides quae tantis temporibus regulariter custodita est a sacratissimo patre nostro Constantino, qui primus imperio splenduit Christianus, nuper turbata sit ad arbitrium unius hominis, qui in synodo Ephesenae civitatis odium et contentiones potius exercuisse narratur, militum praesentia et metu appetens Constantinopolitanae civitatis episcopum Flavianum, eo quod libellum ad apostolicam sedem miserit ad omnes episcopos harum partium per eos qui directi fuerant in concilio a reverentissimo episcopo Romae, qui secundum definitiones Nicaeni concilii consueti sunt interesse, domine sacratissime fili venerabilis imperator. hac itaque gratia tua mansuetudo tantis turbis resistens veritatem inmaculatam fidei catholicae religionis servari praecipiat, ut secundum formam et definitionem apostolicae sedis, quam etiam nos tamquam praecellentem similiter veneramur, in statu sacerdotii inlaeso manente per omnia Flaviano, ad concilii et apostolicae sedis iudicium transmittatur, in qua primus ille qui caelestes claves dignus fuit accipere, principatum episcopatus ordinavit, quando scilicet decet nos huic maximae civitati, quae domina omnium est terrarum, in omnibus reverentiam conservare. diligentius autem etiam in hoc providete ne quod priscus temporibus nostra generatio custodivit, sub nos imminui videatur et per praesens exemplum scismata generentur inter episcopos ac sanctas ecclesias.[105]

To the master [and] victor Theodosius, conqueror, always *augustus* and son, Galla Placidia, most pious and perpetual *augusta* [and] mother. When, at the very moment of our arrival in the old city, we took this care to pay honour to the blessed apostle Peter,

[105] *ACO* II.3.1, 14.21-15.10 (L20). Greek version in *ACO* II.1.1, 5.29-6.18 (M3). Leo, *ep.* 56. Also translated by NPNF 2nd ser. vol. 12, 57-8, and partly from the Greek by Jalland, *St. Leo the Great,* 265 (15.1-8 *hac ... conservare.)* and from the Latin by Wessel, *Leo the Great,* 262 (14.29-34 *fides ... miserit).*

during his very worship of the martyr's altar, the most reverend Bishop Leo (who after his prayer retained himself a little bit) lamented about the catholic faith to us, while he exposed his head in a similar way before the head of the apostles, whom we had just now come to visit. Surrounded by a multitude of bishops, whom he had gathered from innumerable sees in Italy because of the highest position or dignity of this specific place, and blending tears with words, he caused our lamentation too, so that we joined in his weeping.

No small damage came from these happenings, so that the faith that for such a long time has been guarded according to the rules by our most holy father Constantine, who was the first with imperial power to shine as a Christian, has recently been disturbed by the judgement of one man, of whom it is told that in the synod of the city of Ephesus he preferred to exercise hatred and rivalries, while through the presence of soldiers and through fear he assaulted the bishop of the city of Constantinople, Flavian. Due to this, Flavian sent an appeal to the apostolic see, directed at all bishops of these parts, via those who had been sent to the council by the most reverend bishop of Rome. In agreement with the definitions of the Nicene council, they are used to interfere [in these matters], most holy master, son and venerable emperor.

For this reason, therefore, let Your Clemency, resisting so much disturbance, order that the immaculate truth of the faith of the catholic religion may be preserved, so that, in accordance with the form and definition of the apostolic see, which we as well similarly venerate as excellent, Flavian may remain in all respects unharmed in the position of bishop, and [the case] may be transmitted to the judgment of the council and the apostolic see, where he who was worthy to receive the heavenly keys [i.e. Peter] first ordained the highest position of the episcopate, since it is obviously fitting that we safeguard reverence in everything for this greatest city, which is the mistress of the whole world.

However, take care more diligently in this, that what our generation in earlier times has preserved, may not seem to be diminished under us, and that by the present example no schisms may be generated between the bishops and the holy churches.

2B. Response of the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II to his aunt the Western Roman empress-mother Galla Placidia

Dominae meae Placidiae venerabili augustae Theodosius. Ex litteris tuae mansuetudinis nostra cognovit aeternitas quid reverentissimus patriarcha Leo a tua aeternitate poposcerit. his itaque litteris indicamus quoniam de his quae dicta sunt a reverentissimo episcopo, plenius atque apertius saepius scriptum est, ex quibus sine dubitatione manifestatum est nihil nos praeter paternam fidem aut dogmata divina vel definitiones reventissimorum episcoporum qui tam sub divae memoriae Constantino in Nicaea civitate quam dudum nostro praecepto in Epheso congregati sunt, definisse aut decrevisse aut intellexisse, sed hoc solum in Epheso constitui iussimus, ut omnes qui nocibili laesione ecclesias sanctas turbaverunt, digne removerentur. haec sunt quae non ad refragationem, sed ad concordiam et purum vinculum adorandae religionis a reverentissimis patribus sunt decreta; Flavianus autem princeps contentionis huius sacra

sententia ab ecclesiasticis rebus expulsus est. haec igitur sciens tua mansuetudo, domina sacratissima mater et venerabilis augusta, nihil nos aliquando contrarium a tradita fide sentire, sicut a quibusdam dicitur, suspicemini aut cogitetis.[106]

To my Mistress Placidia venerable *augusta*, Theodosius. From the letter of Your Clemency Our Eternity has learned what the most reverend patriarch Leo has asked from Your Eternity. In this letter, therefore, we indicate that what has been said by the most reverend bishop, which has been written about more often quite fully and openly, without a doubt made clear that we neither defined nor decreed nor accepted anything deviating from the paternal faith or the divine doctrine or the definitions of the most reverend bishops – those who congregated under Constantine of holy memory in the city of Nicaea as well as those who congregated recently by our order in Ephesus – but we commanded that only this was to be constituted in Ephesus: that all who by a harmful offence disturbed the holy churches, would justly be removed.

These are the things that, not for resistance, but for concord and a pure bond with the honourable religion, have been decreed by the most reverend fathers. Flavian, on the other hand, the leader of this contention, has been expelled by a holy sentence from the ecclesiastical matters.

So now that Your Clemency knows these things, most holy mistress, mother and venerable *augusta*, do not suspect or think that we ever judge anything contrary to the traditional faith, as is being said by some.

3A. Western Roman empress Licinia Eudoxia to her father the eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II

Domino Theodosio inclito semper augusto et patri Licinia Eudoxia piissima et perpetua augusta. Omnibus notum est tuam mansuetudinem curam atque sollicitudinem habere Christianorum et catholicae fidei in tantum ut iuberetis ad iniuriam eius nihil omnino faciendum. cum igitur feliciter Romae fuissemus ingressi et in liminibus basilicae sanctissimi Petri venissemus, Leo beatissimus Romanae civitatis episcopus etiam cum aliis plurimis episcopis postulationem nobis optulit, dicens omne dogma religionis per Orientem fuisse turbatum et accidisse quatenus tota Christianorum fides ad confusionem omnem perduceretur. nam Flavianum Constantinopolitanae ecclesiae episcopum propter inimicitias Alexandrini episcopi ingemescebat expulsum et hoc cum aliis episcopis postulavit, protestans et ipsorum venerabilium locorum cultum et mansuetudinis nostrae salutem, quatenus ad tuam clementiam ex hac causa meas litteras destinarem, domine sacratissime pater et adorabilis imperator. salutans igitur iusta posco quatenus his litteris curam vestra tranquillitas praebere dignetur et quae male gesta sunt, emendari praecipiat, donec omnibus quae iam definita sunt, revocatis ex integro causa fidei et Christianae religionis, quae mota est, in partibus Italiae congregato concilio perquiratur.

[106] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.15-29 (L23). Greek version in *ACO* II.1.1, 7.25-8.3 (M6). Also partly translated (16.17-24 *his ... removerentur)* by Wessel, *Leo the Great,* 267.

scriptum est enim hic omnem contentionem motam, quatenus Flavianus episcopus ex humanis rebus potuisset auferri.[107]

To my Master the famous Theodosius always *augustus* and father, Licinia Eudoxia, most pious and eternal *augusta*. It is known to all that Your Mildness has care and devotion for the Christians and the catholic faith, so much so that you ordered that nothing at all should be done to its disgrace. So, when we had happily entered Rome and had come to the threshold of the basilica of the most holy Peter, Leo, the most blessed bishop of the Roman city, also with multiple other bishops, brought us a request, saying that all doctrine of our religion throughout the East was disturbed and that the whole faith of the Christians was brought to utter confusion. For he lamented that Flavian, the bishop of the Constantinopolitan church, had been exiled because of hostilities from the Alexandrian bishop. Hence, stressing both his care for the places of veneration and [his prayers for] the wellbeing of Our Mildness, he demanded this together with the other bishops: that I would direct a letter about this case to Your Clemency, most holy master, father and adorable emperor. Therefore, because I welcome what is just, I request that because of this letter Your Tranquillity may show your care and deign to grant [his request] and may order that those bad deeds be corrected, and that everything which has been defined already be recalled completely, until the case of our faith and the Christian religion, that has been disturbed, is examined by a council congregated in Italy. For it has been written that all strife was set in motion by this event: that Flavian was banned from public life.

3B. Response of the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II to his daughter the Western Roman empress Licinia Eudoxia

Dominae meae Eudoxiae venerabili augustae Theodosius. Semper equidem tui desiderii litteris delectamur et has tota animae suavitate complectimur et omnibus tuis petitionibus consuevimus gratanter annuere, domina sacratissima filia venerabilis augusta. sed de praesenti causa, hoc est de Flaviano, qui fuit episcopus, quae in hac causa subsecuta sint, reverentissimo archiepiscopo Leoni perfecte nostra mansuetudo significavit; tuae vero dulcedini hoc solum adprobavimus intimandum quia memoratus Flavianus sacro iudicio ab humanis rebus ablatus est, quatenus totius dubietatis contentio a sacris removeretur ecclesiis et nihil ulterius post haec definire possibile est, cum iam semel ista decisa sint.[108]

To my Mistress Eudoxia, venerable *augusta*, [writes] Theodosius. Of course, we always delight in the letters of your desire, and we embrace them with the full sweetness of our soul, and we are accustomed to granting all your requests with pleasure, most holy mistress, daughter and venerable *augusta*. But about the present case, which is the case about Flavian, who was a bishop, Our Mildness has notified perfectly what happened in

[107] *ACO* II.3.1, 15.11-29 (L21). Greek version in *ACO* II.1.1, 6.19-7.3 (M4). Leo, *ep.* 57.

[108] *ACO* II.3.1, 16.30-17.6 (L24). Greek version in *ACO* II.1.1, 8.4-15 (M7). Partly translated (17.4-6 *Flavianus ... est* and *et nihil ... decisa sint)* by Wessel, *Leo the Great,* 267.

this case to the most reverend Archbishop Leo. To Your Sweetness, however, we have only approved that this should be made known: that the abovementioned Flavian was banned from public life by a holy judgment, causing all doubt and strife to be removed from the holy churches, and that it is not possible to determine anything more after this, because these things have been decided once and for all.

4. Western Roman empress-mother Galla Placidia to her niece the Eastern Roman empress-sister Aelia Pulcheria

Galla Placidia piissima semper augusta Aeliae Pulcheriae piissimae semper augustae filiae. Ut Romam frequentibus concursionibus adaeque desideremus inspicere, causa nobis est amplectendae religionis, ut terminis sanctorum nostram exhiberemus praesentiam, quos certum est pro sua virtute in caelestibus constitutos neque inferiora despicere. nos itaque sacrilegum esse credimus, si sollemnium ordinem denegemus. cum igitur beato apostolo Petro nostram praesentiam dedissemus, illic multitudine sacerdotum reverentissimus Leo papa circumdatus pro dignitate sui loci nos primus adiit. qui propter interpositam gemitus sui tristitiam desiderium paene suum verbis insinuare non poterat, vicit tamen constantia sapientiae sacerdotis, ut lacrimas paululum retineret et causam violatae fidei tamquam huius vindex manifesto sermone proferret. in quo sermone cognovimus nostris temporibus catholicam fidem esse turbatam, quam a divo patre nostro Constantino nostri generis parentes hactenus servaverunt. secundum voluntatem namque cuiusdam pravum aliquid adversus sacerdotem Constantinopolitanum exercitatum dicitur. nos itaque in Epheseno concilio, quo nullus ordinem sacerdotii custodivit neque mensuram, sine consideratione divinitatis omnia esse gesta cognovimus, quatenus praesumptio et iniustitia in quorundam damnationem obtinere dicatur, quae nostris temporibus terribilia esse videntur. debet itaque fides proprie valere, sanctissima atque venerabilis filia augusta. igitur tua clementia secundum catholicam fidem, quod semper nobiscum fecit, et nunc similiter conspirare dignetur, ut quicquid in illo tumultuoso miserrimoque concilio constitutum est, omni virtute submoveatur et omnibus integris permanentibus ad apostolicae sedis, in qua primus beatus apostolorum Petrus qui etiam claves regnorum caelestium suscipiens sacerdotii principatum tenuit, episcopatus causa mittatur. debemus enim primatum in omnibus inmortali conversationi tribuere, quae totum mundum propriae virtutis dominatione complevit et nostro imperio orbem gubernandum servandumque commisit.[109]

The most pious Galla Placidia, forever *augusta*, to her daughter the most pious Aelia Pulcheria, forever *augusta*. Since we so ardently longed to visit Rome often, which is for us an occasion to embrace our religion, we showed our presence on the holy days of the saints, and they certainly do not look down upon these holy days, for they have been established in heaven in return for their virtue. We therefore believe it is a sacrilege if we reject this solemn religious order.

[109] *ACO* II.1.3, 13.1-27 (L18). Greek version in *ACO* II.1.1, 49.21-50.13 (H14). Leo, *ep.* 58. Also partially translated from the Greek by Jalland, *St. Leo the Great,* 266 (13.25-7 *debemus ... commisit)* and from the Latin by Millar, *Greek Roman Empire*, 38 (13.20-27 *igitur tua ... servandumque commisit).*

Hence, when we granted our presence to the blessed apostle Peter, there the most reverend pope Leo, surrounded by a multitude of bishops, came to us first, in accordance with the dignity of his position. And because of his sadness that interrupted his words with weeping, he almost could not express his desire with words, and yet the steadfastness of the bishop's wisdom triumphed, so that he withheld his tears a little bit and brought forth in a clear address the case of the violated faith as its defender. From this address we learned that in our times the catholic faith has been disturbed, although it had been safeguarded by the ancestors of our family since our holy father Constantine. For they say that in accordance with the will of a certain man something vicious has been done against the Constantinopolitan bishop. Accordingly, we learned that during the council of Ephesus, in which nobody guarded the order of the episcopal office nor its dignity, everything was done without consideration of God to such an extent that, as they say, obstinacy and injustice prevailed, leading to the condemnation of some men. In our times these happenings are considered atrocious. Therefore our faith should prevail in the right manner, most holy and venerable daughter *augusta.*

Let therefore Your Clemency now similarly deign to cooperate in the same way, as you have always done with us, in accordance with the catholic faith, so that, whatever has been determined in that tumultuous and most wretched council, may be removed by all virtue. Let the case of the episcopal office be transferred wholly to the apostolic see, on which Peter, the blessed of the apostles, who also received the keys of the Holy Kingdom, held the episcopal office for the first time. After all, we should attribute the first place in all things to the immortal company, who filled the whole world with its own virtue and entrusted the world to our power[110] to reign and protect.

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[110] *Codex Parisinus* 11611 (ninth century): "entrusted the world to our city" *(imperio = urbe).*

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