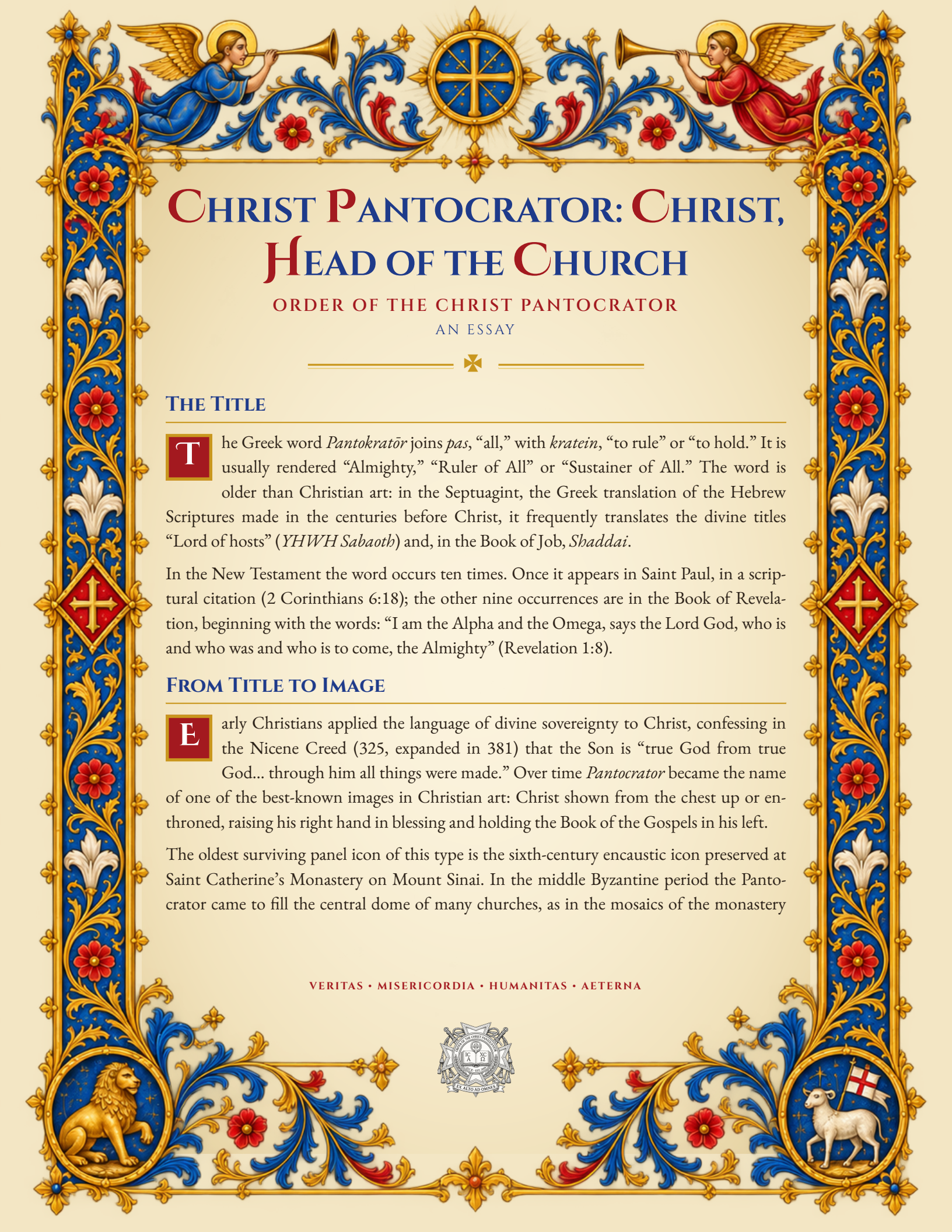




CHRIST PANTOCRATOR: CHRIST, HEAD OF THE CHURCH

ORDER OF THE CHRIST PANTOCRATOR

AN ESSAY

THE TITLE

The Greek word *Pantokrator* joins *pas*, “all,” with *kratein*, “to rule” or “to hold.” It is usually rendered “Almighty,” “Ruler of All” or “Sustainer of All.” The word is older than Christian art: in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made in the centuries before Christ, it frequently translates the divine titles “Lord of hosts” (*YHWH Sabaoth*) and, in the Book of Job, *Shaddai*.

In the New Testament the word occurs ten times. Once it appears in Saint Paul, in a scriptural citation (2 Corinthians 6:18); the other nine occurrences are in the Book of Revelation, beginning with the words: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).

FROM TITLE TO IMAGE

Early Christians applied the language of divine sovereignty to Christ, confessing in the Nicene Creed (325, expanded in 381) that the Son is “true God from true God... through him all things were made.” Over time *Pantocrator* became the name of one of the best-known images in Christian art: Christ shown from the chest up or enthroned, raising his right hand in blessing and holding the Book of the Gospels in his left.

The oldest surviving panel icon of this type is the sixth-century encaustic icon preserved at Saint Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai. In the middle Byzantine period the Pantocrator came to fill the central dome of many churches, as in the mosaics of the monastery

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church at Daphni near Athens (around 1100). The type spread far beyond the Greek-speaking world; the apse mosaics of the cathedrals of Cefalù and Monreale in Sicily, made in the twelfth century, are among its best-known examples in the West.

Icons of this type usually carry the abbreviation IC XC, for the Greek *Iēsous Christos*, and the cross-inscribed halo often bears the Greek letters *ὁ ὢν*, “the One who is,” recalling God’s self-naming in Exodus 3:14.

CHRIST, HEAD OF THE CHURCH

The New Testament describes Christ as head of the Church in several places. God “has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body” (Ephesians 1:22–23). “He is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18). Believers are to “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

In this image, Christian tradition has seen both majesty and nearness. The one who holds all things in being is the same one who blesses, teaches and gives himself for the life of the world. The Church therefore understands its authority as received rather than possessed: every ministry in the Church is a service offered in Christ’s name.

WHY THE ORDER BEARS THIS NAME

The Order of the Christ Pantocrator takes its name from this ancient title as a reminder that Christ, not any office-holder, is head of the Church. The Order’s structures, its General Synod, its College of Cardinals and the office of the High Chancellor, exist to serve, connect and support, never to replace that headship.

The motto of the Order, *Ex Alto Ad Omnes*, “from on high, to all,” expresses the same conviction: grace is given from above, and it is meant for everyone.

NOTES AND FURTHER READING

1. Septuagint usage: e.g. 2 Samuel 7:8; Amos 4:13; Job 5:17.
2. New Testament occurrences: 2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 16:14; 19:6; 19:15; 21:22.

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3. Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, vol. 1 (Princeton, 1976).
4. Ernst Kitzinger, *The Mosaics of Monreale* (Palermo, 1960).
5. Robin Cormack, *Icons* (London: British Museum Press, 2007).

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