

**Rangar CLINE**

**Onomazein Angelous: Christian Authority and Angel Invocation in Late Antiquity**

Canon Thirty-Five of the Synod of Laodicaea (mid-fourth century) states that Christians should not depart from the church, invoke angels (*onomazein angelous*), and hold assemblies. Additionally, the synod described angel invocation as a "hidden idolatry." In order to illustrate the sort of angel invocations the fourth-century church confronted and in order to understand the synod's reaction, I examine the practice of extra-ecclesiastical angel invocation as exhibited by invocations of angels inscribed on stones, amulets, and lamellae (E.g. Bonner 1950: nos. 41 and 172; Delatte and Derchainé 1964: nos. 142 and 362; D. Jordan 1991:61-69). The study's examination of epigraphic material is the result of field research in Turkey and the Aegean basin, as well as museum research in the Cabinet des Médailles et Antiquité at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

A number of late-antique invocations of angels carved on amulets contain Christian formulas or symbols combined with the names of archangels, pagan and Gnostic deities, depictions of fabulous creatures, as well as Greek adaptations of Hebrew words and phrases. Those who employed such syncretistic formulae believed them to be efficacious for acquiring divine aid, but these invocations were troubling for the Christian church, particularly in the fourth century as the Church attempted to define orthodoxy. Such syncretistic angel invocations are one reason that reactions against angel invocation and veneration appear in Christian literature of the later Roman era. But, while Christian intellectuals perceived a difference between orthodox and heterodox forms of angel invocation (e.g. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.4-7; Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 10.25-26), many who called upon angels for help in their daily lives did not. For those invoking angels through inscriptions on stones, amulets, and lamellae, ritual efficacy, rather than orthodoxy, was most important.

Previous studies noting the Synod of Laodicaea's ban on angel invocation have not sufficiently appreciated that the synod was careful to prohibit angel invocation away from the church and did not prohibit angel invocation entirely (e.g. C. E. Arnold 1996: 85-7, G. Peers 2001:10-11). Rather, the synod was attempting to establish church authority over angel invocation by preventing Christians from invoking angelic intermediaries apart from clerical supervision. Numerous inscriptions, as well as literary sources, testify to the long-standing popularity of angel invocation in the region of Laodicaea (A.R.R. Sheppard 1980/81:71-101, S. Mitchell 1993: II, 46). I therefore argue that the synod's ban on angel invocation was an attempt to bring within the control of the church a popular religious practice that could rival the church's authority over intermediation and access to the divine. In this regard, the synod's ban on extra-ecclesiastical angel invocation was part of a broader trend in early Christianity of attempting to bring spiritually powerful practices and objects (as well as people) under the authority of the church (E.g. P. Brown 1981; 1971), where clerical supervision could insure their orthodoxy.