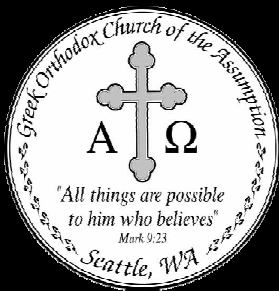


GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION

# Studies in the Faith Iconography



**GREEK ORTHODOX  
CHURCH  
OF THE  
ASSUMPTION**

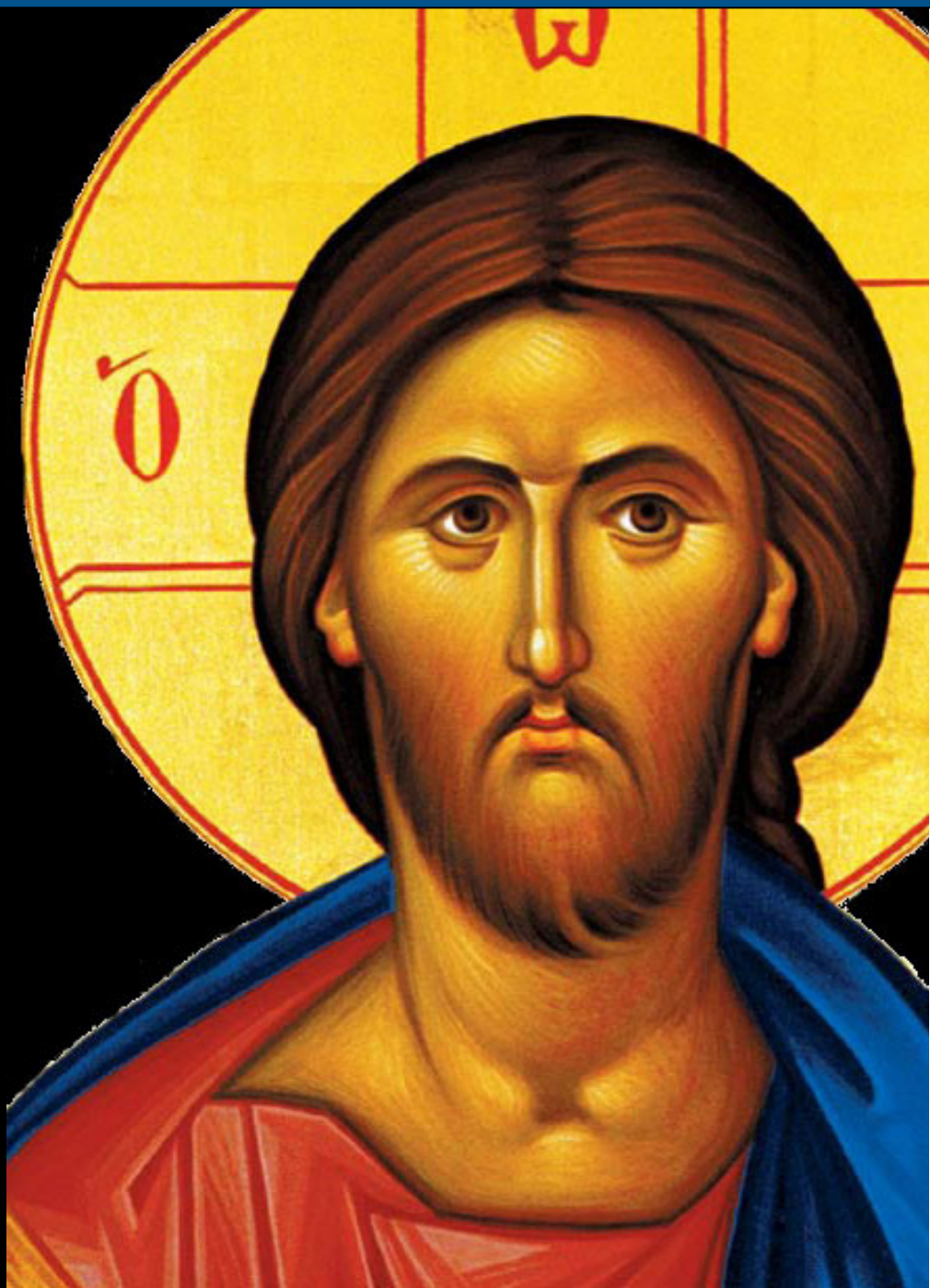
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# ICONOGRAPHY

## READING ASSIGNMENTS

Byzantine Iconography, a Synopsis by Diamantis Cassis.

Icons in a Hostile World: Iconoclasts and the Second Council of Nicaea by Dr. Robert J. Newman.

The Role of the Icon in the Orthodox Church by Reverend Cyril Loeb

Ikons in Russia by Michael Klimenko

## ICONS - WINDOWS TO HEAVEN

**A**n icon is not just a religious picture. It is one of the ways God reveals himself to us. Icons are the *visual Gospel*, just as the Bible is the *written Gospel*. Icons are like the sacraments, they mediate God's grace to us. Through icons, the Orthodox Christian receives a vision of the spiritual world. Thus, icons are windows to heaven!

### ICONS AND THE BIBLE

#### *Why Do We Have Icons?*

Because Jesus Christ is the icon of God. *"He is the image (ΕΙΚΟΝ) of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."* (Colossians 1:15)

Because we are made in God's image. *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our Likeness...' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* (Genesis 1:26-27)

Because images were part of Old Testament worship. *"On the walls all around the temple, in both the inner and outer rooms, he carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers."* (I Kings 6:29, cf. Exodus 26:1)

Because of the Incarnation. The most important reason for icons is the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When the Son of God took on human flesh, for the first time in history God became visible. In the Gospel of John we are told: *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the Only Begotten who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14) and *"No one has ever seen God, but God the Only Begotten, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."* (John 1:18) Icons are a consequence of the Incarnation. The icon of Christ tells us that the Incarnation was a real historic event, not something imaginary or an abstract theological doctrine.

Because it is part of our salvation. Jesus came not only to die for our sins but also to restore the *imago Dei* within us. Paul writes, *"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image, (ΕΙΚΟΝ) of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."* (Romans 8:29, KJV) Thus, the icon expresses the goal of our salvation – theosis.

### ICONS AND HOLY TRADITION

Icons were a part of the early Church. If you visit the catacombs where the early Christians gathered for worship you will see paintings of Christ, of Mary, and the saints. These catacomb paintings have been dated as early as A.D. 220. Eusebius, one of the earliest church historians (c. 265 to c. 339) makes mention in his *Church History* of colored portraits of Christ and his apostles (7:18).

However the icons were not easily accepted in the early Church. There were many who believed that icons violated the second of the Ten Commandments. Those who opposed icons are known as Iconoclasts, those who favored icons are known as iconodulists. The Christian Church resolved this issue at the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea II) which was held in A.D. 787. It was at this council that the Church settled the issue once and for all. The Orthodox Church celebrates the victory of the icons on "Orthodox Sunday", the first Sunday of Lent. Below are excerpts from the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

*We keep all the ecclesiastical traditions which have been handed down to us, whether written or unwritten, free from innovations. One of the traditions which we thus preserve is that of making representational paintings, which is in accord with the history of the preaching of the Gospel, as confirming the real and not merely imaginary incarnation of God the Word, and as contributing to our good in other ways. To these should be given salutation and honorable reverence, not indeed the true worship of faith, which pertains to the divine nature alone... For the honor which is paid to the icon passes on to that which the icon represents, and he who reveres the icon reveres in it the person who is represented.*

Icons are not an option. Icons are not an "Eastern thing"; because icons are an integral part of the historic Christian faith, they are for all Christians, East and West. The Orthodox Church takes icons seriously because icons are part of the fullness of the Christian faith.

Icons in the Church are more than just decorations; icons protect the Orthodox faith. The icons you see in Church declare the official teaching of the Orthodox Church: that Christ is the *Pantocrator* (the all ruling one), that Christ is very God and very man, that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary; that Christ died on the Cross for our sins, that Christ feeds us with his body and blood in the Eucharist.

## ICONS AND WORSHIP

There are three places where you are likely to encounter an icon: at the entrance of Church, on the iconostasis (icon screen) inside Church, and inside the home of an Orthodox Christian. When we meet people, the first thing we do is greet them. When we go to Church we meet the priest and our fellow parishioners, but more importantly we meet our Lord Jesus Christ, his mother Mary Theotokos, the saints and the angels. In the West we greet people with a handshake or high five, in the East people bow to each other, but in the Church we greet the icons of Christ and the saints with the sign of the cross and a reverent kiss.

When we enter an Orthodox Church, the first thing we do is venerate the icons of Christ and his Mother, and then we kiss the Holy Gospels. Then when we are in the Church we go up to the iconostasis and venerate the icons. When we enter an Orthodox home, we first make the sign of the cross and bow towards the icon of Christ, after that we greet the host. The principle here being that we honor Christ first before all others.

Notice that during the service the priest censes not only the icons but also the congregation. That is because we are all made in God's image! This is why we must treat all people with honor and dignity; every human being bears the *imago Dei*. And Christ has come to restore that image in order that we may glorify God the Father in our worship and our whole lives. It is in worship that our deepest nature comes out – we were made by God for the worship of God. ■

## PRACTICAL HELPS - HOW TO VENERATE ICONS

### HOW TO READ AN ICON

**A**n icon is more like a portrait than a photograph. A photograph records a person's physical features but a portrait records the person's physical features and brings out the person's character and expresses their inner nature. All aspects of the icon convey theology:

- A. Elongated fingers;
- B. Exaggerated sensory organs such as the nose, mouth, eyes, ears;
- C. The color of the icons (red signifying divinity, blue signifying humanity);
- D. The gesture of the hand or the posture of the body.

Knowing how to read an icon will help us to be aware of the theological significance of a particular icon. It will also open your mind and heart to the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit teach you through the icons; let the Holy Spirit draw you deeper into kingdom of God. Quiet prayerful reflection before an icon will strengthen and deepen one's faith.

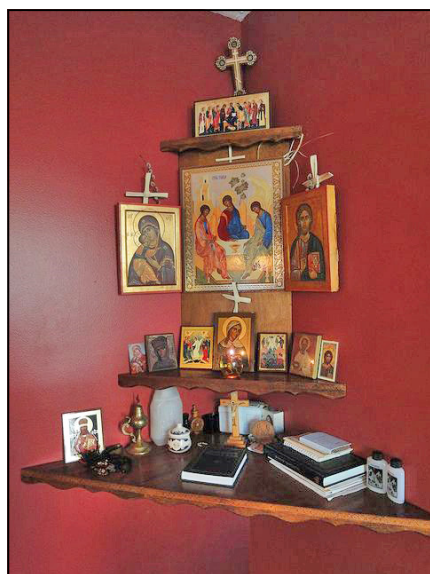
Because icons are aids to prayer, it is important to have icons blessed by the priest. We do this to set apart icons for a sacred purpose. An icon is not an icon until it has been blessed. This ensures that our icons are consistent with the teachings of the Orthodox Church and will not mislead us.

### HOW TO VENERATE AN ICON

When we enter the Church the first thing we do is light a candle, put the candle in the box underneath the icon of Christ and say a short prayer. Then, we kiss the icon as a gesture of love and respect. For example, with the icon of Christ holding the Bible Orthodox Christians kiss the Lord's right hand, the hand with which he gives the blessing; with the icon of Mary Theotokos we kiss her right hand, the hand with which she holds her Son.

For Christians who are new to the Orthodox faith or who are exploring Orthodoxy, my advice is: don't force yourself and do what life-long Orthodox Christians do. Let the Holy Spirit guide you in your prayer life. Watch and learn from other Orthodox Christians. Let yourself grow into the Orthodox way of prayer.

### HOW TO USE AN ICON IN PERSONAL PRAYER



If you wish to start praying with icons it is best to acquire an icon of Christ, then an icon of Mary. Many Orthodox Christians have an icon corner in their home. Others may have an icon on their desk. There are other aids to prayer. Some find it helpful to light a candle and burn incense, many like to use prayer books while others prefer to pray freely, but the important thing is to pray! Use the icon to focus your thoughts on Christ. Be aware of Christ's invisible but very real presence. Become aware of the Virgin Mary and the saints who are praying with you. Become aware of the angels who are constantly standing in God's holy presence and worshipping God day and night. ■

## WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT ICONS

A Photograph: Records features as they are

A Portrait: Reproduces a person's features in a way that is true to life and recognizable; but at the same time it brings out his character and gives expression to his inner nature.

An Icon: is more like a portrait than a photograph.

The word icon comes from the Greek work "Eikon" which means image.

When it is blessed by a priest then it is truly an icon in the fullest sense of the word.

The purpose of the icon is three-fold:

1. To create reverence in worship—to remind us that those in heaven are worshipping with us.
2. To instruct those who are unable to read (prior to Scripture)
3. To express our goal in life—sanctification—from the restored image of God (justification, Baptism), to the likeness of God (sanctification, sacraments) to become living icons in today's world.

An Icon is not simply a religious picture. It is one of the ways whereby God is revealed to us. Through icons the Orthodox Christian receives a vision of the spiritual world. Therefore icons are windows to heaven!

Icons have been called prayers, hymns, sermons in form and color. They are the visual Gospel, the Bible being the verbal Gospel.

### EXAMPLES OF ICONS

Since icons are very much a part of Church Tradition, icon painters are not free to adapt or innovate as they please as their work must reflect not only their own aesthetic sentiments, but the mind of the church. The 7th Ecumenical Council stated that the Church, even though she may depict the Lord through iconography in His human form, must not separate in the representation Christ's flesh from His divinity. Christ has to be represented in Orthodox iconography as God-Man. Therefore, iconographers must not only be good artists, but spiritual people of prayer, living the sacramental life of the Church. They must see iconography as a religious vocation, as someone who teaches visual theology. The icon is a revelation not an illustration or decoration. All aspects of the Icon convey theology:

- A. Elongated fingers;
- B. Exaggerated sensory organs such as the nose, mouth, eyes, ears;
- C. The color of the icons (Virgin Mary and Christ).

The halo is a result of western religious influence that has been accepted in Orthodox iconography. The halo is not the determining factor which characterizes one as a Saint in an icon. Holiness is depicted by the entire style of the icon. In some older icons, the halo is missing.

One of the most important icons of the church is that of the Bible, an Icon of words.

## THE ICONOCLASTIC CONTROVERSY

The iconoclastic controversy was nothing more than a dispute concerning the person of Jesus Christ.

Iconoclasts: demanded the destruction of icons because they were suspicious of any religious art which represented human beings or God. Saw in images idolatry.

Iconodules: vigorously defended the place of icons in the life of the Church.

The issues involved were not issues involving iconography, but:

1. Character of God's Human Nature

In Old Testament times, God could not be depicted because he had not been incarnate. This changed the moment God became Man in Christ. To deny iconography is to deny that God became Man in Christ!

2. Christian Attitude Towards Matter

Matter is not worshipped. We worship the God of matter who became matter for our sake, so that we might work out our salvation through matter within the context of the sacramental life of the church which is administered through matter. Matter, created by God is good. Matter abused by man is bad!

3. The True Meaning of Christian Redemption

To deny that God bridged the gap between himself and mankind through the incarnation of His son is to deny our own salvation. God became man; therefore man (and all matter) can be redeemed.

## ICONS SAFEGUARD A FULL AND PROPER DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION

This iconoclastic controversy lasted about 120 years:

Phase I: 726 AD to 787 AD

Attack started by Leo III and ended with the 7th council.

The iconodule position was upheld by the 7th Ecumenical Council at Nicaea.

The council stated that icons were to be kept in the churches and venerated as is the cross and the bible.

Phase II: 815 AD to 843 AD

Attack started by Leo V the Armenian. Icons were permanently reinstated by Empress Theodora

The final victory of the icons in 843 AD is known as the triumph of Orthodoxy and is commemorated in a special service celebrated on "Orthodox Sunday" (the first Sunday in Lent).

**WE ARE GOD'S LIVING ICON (THAT IS WHY THE PRIEST CENSES YOU DURING LITURGY—HE IS RECOGNIZING THE LIVING ICON OF CHRIST THAT EXISTS WITHIN YOU). AS WE VENERATE ICONS OUT OF RESPECT, SO MUST WE TREAT ALL PEOPLE—CHRIST'S LIVING ICONS—WITH RESPECT. ■**

## WHAT THE ORTHODOX CHURCH BELIEVES ABOUT ICONS

### 1. Icon

- A. Icon comes from the Greek word Eikona which means \_\_\_\_\_.
- B. The purpose of the icon is threefold:
  - 1. To instruct those who are unable to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 2. To serve as a \_\_\_\_\_ between the worshipper and God.
  - 3. To create reverence in \_\_\_\_\_.

### 2. Iconography

#### A. The Halo

- 1. The \_\_\_\_\_ is radiating from that person.
- 2. Helps to emphasize the \_\_\_\_\_ of the person but is not required to signify that a Saint is being represented.
  - A. Christ's Halo and the Halo of the Saints
  - B. Human but exaggerated features to signify that Christ was not only fully \_\_\_\_\_ but fully \_\_\_\_\_.
  - C. Person depicted looks at you in the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - D. We are the ultimate Icon because we are made in God's \_\_\_\_\_.  
This is the reason the priest censes the icons and the \_\_\_\_\_.

### 3. The Existential Encounter

- A. The icon is in effect a \_\_\_\_\_.
- B. An icon is not fully an icon until it has been blessed by the \_\_\_\_\_ in Church.  
Then, it becomes a link between the human and divine.
- C. Icons and miracles. The Wonder-working icons.

### 4. Icons Express Our Goal in Life

- A. Our goal in life is to become like God, to undergo \_\_\_\_\_.
- B. Theosis begins at \_\_\_\_\_ when God's restored image is bestowed within us.
  - 1. Our goal is to proceed from the restored \_\_\_\_\_ which is the gift we receive at baptism, to the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
  - 2. The likeness of God is not \_\_\_\_\_ to us, we must \_\_\_\_\_ to attain it.
  - 3. In striving to attain Christ's likeness, this is our personal \_\_\_\_\_ that we must achieve through God's many blessings and grace.
  - 4. To proceed from image to likeness by God's grace and thus become living \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ in the world today is to attain \_\_\_\_\_.

### 5. The Iconoclasts

- A. The iconoclasts held that God \_\_\_\_\_ be painted because He is eternal in invisible.
- B. God can be painted. Why? Because he became \_\_\_\_\_. It is true that no one has ever seen God until \_\_\_\_\_ came into the world.
- C. The first Sunday of Lent is the Sunday of Orthodoxy. The feast commemorates the day in which the use of icons were reinstated in worship by the 7th Ecumenical Council after a period of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 1. What we really commemorate is not the re-institution of religious iconography, but rather the \_\_\_\_\_ of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the salvation of mankind.

### 6. The Old Testament:

A. Exodus 20:4-5

B. Exodus 25:18-22



## BYZANTINE ICONOGRAPHY

### A Synopsis by Diamantis Cassis

Iconography can probably be better understood when compared with the philosophy of Western art which may be stated as: "Art is the expression of the Individual and influence of his environment at a particular period of time." Western art seems to have evolved without a common denominator, and as a result does not adhere to strict rules. If rules are made, the artist is free to change or alter them during the process to the point where the act or process can become the subject of his art. In other words, it can be art for art's sake. This idea has gained a great deal of momentum over the past century in Western culture as evidenced by its rapidly changing and diverse styles. Iconography, on the other hand, is not "art for art's sake," but "art for the edification of mankind". It is not the expression of only one person, but the expression of the historical Christian church, its Traditions, and Holy Scripture. The icon painter or iconographer is required to be a Christian, and from the two-thousand year old Christian values, derives his inspiration for expression. The originator or creator of this art form is the unbroken Tradition of the Church. The artist is like a musician who uses his talent to interpret and perform the composers musical composition. For this reason, iconography has not experienced the drastic stylistic changes that Western art has because it kept its roots and built on them. Western art is seen as a process of revolutionary statements where the present one exists in disagreement or negation of the one it preceded. It seems as though its purpose is "how to be different." Iconography, on the other hand, has been going through a "slow evolutionary process", and its purpose is "how to be better" rather than "how to be different". This consistent style gives iconography a timeless and universal quality which can truly be referred to as classical.

The word "icon" is usually considered to apply to a religious picture of two dimensions or relief. But, to the Orthodox Church, the term is a theological one. "Icon", from the Greek, means image as in reflection. And the icon is, in fact, a manmade reflection of the incomprehensible; an earthly image of the heavenly pattern.

The veneration which an Orthodox Christian accords to this image is not one of worship, but of adoration. In respecting the image, the believer pays homage to its Prototype. Man is too insignificant a creature to be able to see his God directly in this life. The mystic, other worldly quality of Byzantine icons, their expressively non-naturalistic form, echoes this humility of man in exaltation of God.

The beginnings of Byzantine art are found in the earliest days of Christianity. Combining Greek, Roman and Middle Eastern influences, it quickly evolved to an abstract, stylized form for the instruction and inspiration of the faithful. Because of the destruction of images in the eighth century (iconoclasm), little remains before that time. But of the later works, there are roughly three main schools: the Constantinopolitan, featuring asceticism and imperial grandeur (Russian Iconography is its direct descendent); the Macedonian; with less starkness, more roundness of form; and Cretan, with elongated features and somber colors. Partial or complete adornment with silver Or gold medal covering as an expression of piety became common after the fifteenth century.

As a form of inspiration, the icon is to the eye the same as music is to the ear; as incense is to the smell; as veneration to the touch; and as Holy Communion to the taste. Although, as mentioned, these may seem superficial, the Intent is to charge all of our senses and guide us toward a higher and spiritual understanding.

For those who may not be familiar with icons, at first glance they may appear rather strange, but further observation will reveal various unique qualities. As one gazes at an icon of a saint, the pose will be straightforward, austere, and serious because it is a confrontation with the Kingdom of God. It will be matter of fact and not an ostentatious or theatrical pose. The saint will not contain any worldly or mundane characteristics, but portray a solemn and spiritual quality. The eyes of the saint will be rather large symbolizing faith in God; the nose will be long and slender; denoting dignity; the mouth will be small, the ears large indicating humility and obedience to God by being able to listen more to His Word and speaking very little. The forehead of the saint will be rather large showing spiritual wisdom and the overall appearance will be slender from fasting and control of worldly temptations. Finally, this art will look abstract and unnatural because of inverse visual perspective where the vanishing point will not be somewhere in the picture, but in the eye of the viewer. The scene will expand rather

continued ➔



than diminish, symbolizing that we, the viewers, live in a finite world and we gaze at a window of eternity. Also, through this symbolic inverse perspective we understand the fact that man cannot, on his own, walk in God's domain, but God, through His Grace, comes to us and lifts us up.

The icon invokes a sense of divinity, yet it maintains an anthropomorphic form. It attracts the gaze of the believer and in its own way guides and directs his prayer. In the historical context, the Church realized the importance and the necessity of providing this visual aid, together with architecture, music, the fragrance of incense and the participation of communion to provide "a total work of art" creating a heavenly environment to bring the believer closer to his God. ■

## ICONS IN A HOSTILE WORLD ICONOCLASM AND THE SECOND COUNCIL OF NICAEEA

by Dr. Robert J. Newman

**I**conoclasm – a Greek word meaning "the breaking of icons." This word conjures up pictures of the attacks on churches in Germany and England during the Protestant Reformation of the 15th-16th centuries. Many of the precious artworks displayed in our museums today had first to be fished up out of the rivers into which they were unceremoniously thrown. Few people, however, realize that the church had already once dealt with the question of the honor to be paid to icons. It happened already in the 8th century, in the eastern part of the Church which has become identified with the Orthodox Church today. When we think of present-day Orthodox Churches, with their elaborate icon screens and walls filled with the representations of Christ, the Mother of God, and the Saints, it is hard to believe that at one time, the power of the emperor and the chief church officials were lined up against the use of icons in the churches.

The destructions of images is closely linked with the name of Leo III, Byzantine emperor from 717 - 741. His son and heir, Constantine V, emperor from 741 - 775 continued his father's anti-image policy. Constantine's son, Leo IV, lightened the persecution and his widow, i.e., finally restored the worship of icons, calling the second Council of Nicaea in 778 to restore the orthodox position. This period of peace was interrupted by a second wave of iconoclasm under the emperors Leo V. Michael II and Theophilus, from 815 - 842, and icon worship was permanently re-established by Theodora, the widow of Theophilus in 843. Our main focus in this article will be the first period of iconoclasm up until the second Council of Nicaea.

Many questions concerning iconoclasm remain very obscure, since our sources are entirely written by the enemies of the iconoclasts, and most of the original iconoclast works have been destroyed or only survive as quotations out of context. As a result, for example, we are not even sure why Leo III decided to outlaw the honoring of icons. Some scholars have seen either Jewish or Moslem influence, since both these religions forbid the representation of the deity; the latter is a particularly attractive suggestion, since a large part of the empire had been overrun by the Moslems, and a number of Greek-speaking Christians now found themselves in Moslem hands. No evidence can be found to substantiate either of these influences, however, and Leo seems to have been extremely harsh towards these two enemies of Christian empire in other dealings.

One mistake many scholars make in interpreting events in the Byzantine Empire is to assume that religious controversies must ultimately have some secular motivation force. Trying to find some other reason for Leo's actions outside of a religious conviction falls into this error. Apparently, Leo simply saw himself in the prophetic role of a new Moses or Josiah, whose job was to root out what he perceived as widespread idolatry. We can only guess at why he saw himself in this role. Since he was born in Moslem-controlled Syria, where there was already a movement against image worship, he may have been convinced that his victory in the struggle to become emperor was a sign from God that he should stem the tide of the abuse of image worshipping. Another scholar suggested that Leo saw the volcanic eruption of Thera and Therasia in 726 as a sign from God that he should cleanse the Christian religion of its pagan tendencies. In either case, Leo issued an edict against images in 726.

The Immediate reaction took place on three fronts. There were riots in Constantinople, in Greece and in the islands. A rival emperor marched on Constantinople, but was easily defeated. The Patriarch Germanos and his clergy condemned the action, and Leo retaliated by closing the church schools and by deposing the patriarch, replacing him by a court official, Anastasius, who was a devoted iconoclast. The emperor's actions also caused problems and permanent damage in the west. The provinces in Italy were already shaky in their loyalty to Constantinople, especially with the incursion of the Germanic tribe of the Lombards. The edict against images evoked excommunications against the chief imperial representative by the Bishop of Rome, Gregory II, and revolts in Venice, Ravenna, Rome and Campania. The new imperial representative, Eutychius, marched on Rome, but did not succeed in taking it. Further disturbance was caused by the appointment of the new patriarch, Gregory's successor, Gregory III, refused to recognize the appointment and even held a synod in 732 excommunicating all those who opposed images. Leo tried to suppress this rebellion, but his fleet was destroyed on the way. As a result, the empire effectively lost control in Italy; in 738, Gregory turned to the new European power, the Frankish Master of the Palace, Charles Martel. This move, of course, ultimately resulted in the crowning of Charlemagne as emperor in 800.

The third front of resistance was mainly literary and took place in lands under Moslem control. In this area, the principle name is St. John Damascene, who wrote three works against iconoclasm between 726 and 737. In this connection, he laid down the very important principle, that "to legislate in ecclesiastical matters did not pertain to the Emperor." Because of his defense of images, it is said that the emperor denounced John to the Caliph for treason. The Caliph had John's hand cut off, but it was restored the next night through the intercession of the Theotokos because of his great work in her honor.

Despite the suppression of various uprisings, the anti-image policy of Leo and of his son Constantine until 753 was fairly mild. Constantine tried to place the policy of his father on a sounder theological footing and in a series of tracts, called *peuseis*, he formulated for the first time the Christological underpinnings of the iconoclast position. According to Constantine, those who worshipped images fell victim to two seemingly contradictory heresies - Nestorianism, which claimed the radical separation of the two natures of Christ, and Monophysitism, which confused His two natures. The worshippers of images had to claim either that the Image represented only the human nature of Christ and, therefore, separated it from the divine, or that it represented some amalgamation of the two natures, thus blending the two natures into one.

In 753, Constantine called a council, which named itself the seventh ecumenical council, at Hieria. The council employed and refined Constantine's arguments, and added the argument that only the Eucharistic bread and wine were true "images" of Christ. The council, however, was very clear in supporting the cult of the saints and of the Theotokos.

After the Council of Hieria, Constantine's attacks on image worshippers became more intense. To this attack, he added a bloody, attack on monasticism which he saw as a stain on the good men of the empire. He even went so far as to change the decrees of his own council, denying prayers or honor to the Theotokos or the Saints. While not denying Mary the title of Theotokos, which denial would have opened the way to a charge of Nestorianism, Constantine claimed that her dignity was merely temporary and after the birth of Christ, she was reduced to the status of an ordinary woman. As an example, he showed a bag full of gold coins, representing Mary before giving birth, and then emptying the bag, representing her after Christ's birth.

Constantine's son, Leo IV, carried on his father's policies, but without as much zeal. After his death, he was succeeded by his wife, Irene, as regent for her minor son, Constantine VI. Irene was an ambitious woman and a devout worshipper of icons. Under her reign, a council was called at Nicaea in 787, which restored and refined the understanding of the honor to be paid to icons and which condemned the decrees of the council of 753. The council fathers made the very important distinction between adoration (*latreia*) which was reserved for God alone, and veneration (*Proskynisis*). The victory of the icon-worshippers and of the monks represented a new era in Byzantine Christianity and marked a restoration of morals.

Strangely enough, the first resistance to the council came from the West, where the Iconoclastic emperors had

found their greatest enemies. The cause of this friction is really the first clear sign of the breakdown in communications between east and west which would ultimately lead to the division of Christianity in the 11th century. The decrees of the council had, naturally, been drawn up in Greek. These decrees were, in turn, translated into Latin by the papal librarian, Anastasius. The decrees, however, were pathetically garbled and mistranslated, sometimes entirely misrepresenting entirely the will of the council. One major error was the glossing over of the distinction which the council drew between *latreia* and *proskynisis* by translating both words as *adoratio*. It was only natural, then, when Charlemagne was presented with the conciliar decrees that he rejected the doctrine of the council as idolatry. Charlemagne had his objections to the decrees set out in the *Libre Carolini* which suffered from a strong anti-Greek polemic as well as from the garbled and incomplete version of the conciliar decrees which its author possessed. In many ways, however, this document comes extremely close to supporting the position of the iconoclasts.

Despite the acceptance of the council by the Roman Bishop Hadrian, recognizing it as the true Seventh Ecumenical Council, western theology of images was more heavily influenced by the Carolingian reaction against the conciliar decrees. In the west, images were completely separated from the Platonic idea of representation which gives such power and presence to icons. As a result, images in the west became more "human;" there was less emphasis on the representation of divine grace. Because of this radical separation between image and person represented, images cannot receive any sort of honor in the west; unlike icons in the east, they are not allowed to be incensed. The one exception to this rule is the ability to incense the cross. This exception is actually a remnant of the emphasis which the iconoclasts and the *Libri Carolini* placed on the cult of the cross.

Iconoclasm thus had two very important results. The importance of images in the Church was reaffirmed and based on solid theology and on the witness of the fathers and not simply on popular piety which can so often lead to excess and abuses. On the other hand, the heretical position of the emperor and his court led to a loss of the western provinces of the empire to the control of the Bishop of Rome and the newly rising power of the Franks, a result that would change the outcome of western European history and cultural development. These results further weakened the position of the Byzantine emperor both temporally and spiritually, a weakness that haunted the empire and finally caused its destruction in 1453. ■

## THE ROLE OF THE ICON IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

By Reverend Cyril Loeb

**I**cons are representations of sacred persons in oil on wood. They can also be wrought in mosaic, ivory and other materials. The sacred art may represent Christ, the Virgin Mary, or saints venerated in the Orthodox Church, including Old Testament figures as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, King David the Psalmist, Esther, Ruth, etc. They may depict events in the life of Christ, the Birthgiver of God, Mary, or Apostles, Evangelists and other saints. Their style is in the Byzantine tradition, characterized by a highly stylized technique. Some icons are covered with silver or gold shields bearing in relief the parts of the body they cover, but hands and faces remain uncovered.

Icons became numerous from the 5th century, and as a result of the iconoclastic controversy of the 8th and 9th centuries, devotion to them increased. Since then, icons serve an essential role in both public and private worship, and are accorded external marks of veneration such as being incensed, kissed, and decorated with precious gems and flowers. Orthodox Christians believe that the saints they depict exercise their beneficial powers through them in favor of their supplicants. Icons exert a dynamic spiritual influence in personal, family, ecclesial and national life among Orthodox Christians, and are believed to be effective against illness and dangers (whether spiritual or physical) and to procure God's blessings as powerful channels of divine Grace.

Regarding the nature of veneration of icons by Orthodox Christians, the doctrinal basis - also propounded by St. Thomas Aquinas, the "Angelic Doctor" of western scholastic philosophy, - is Saint Basil's principle by which

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the honor accorded to the image depicted on the icon passes onto its prototype, that is, to the person appearing on the icon.

Thus, the veneration of holy icons is emphatically NOT idolatry (worship of graven images) in any sense whatsoever. The reality - the sacred person or event is honored - not the physical material from which the icon is made.

Clear and convincing examples of the principle by which the homage paid to the image depicted is intended for its prototype - the reality represented - is the loving respect we give to cherished symbols which also represent realities not physically present in the object itself which is being honored. We salute the flag of our country, intending thereby to honor the invisible, inner reality by respecting the visible, outer sign or symbol. Neither the cloth fabric nor particular design are the object of our love and respect, but the realities behind the flag...the things for which it stands and represents: liberty and justice for all. Likewise, we lovingly preserve and often carry with us or display pictures of loved ones - even those who have passed away - and bestow a reverent kiss on the image of relatives and friends. We do so to honor the memory, indeed the very person represented by the painting or photograph, not the canvas and paint or paper on which the image appears.

Christian art began with simple symbols representing the Person and Divinity of Christ. The Church was symbolized by a ship called 'the ark of salvation', an anchor symbolizing hope, the Cross signified salvation, and a peacock indicated immortality. From the time Constantine adopted Christianity as the religion of his newly established empire, Christian art began to depict the Church as a Church Triumphant in an eruption of religious Idealism. However, soon after, and under Syrian influence, Christian art became more realistic. Thus Christ appears no more as a Greek youth but with a beard and eastern garments, while His crucifixion is painted with the emotion and pathos it really had.

And as Christian churches acquired the now characteristic Byzantine architecture, their Iconography took a stylized and didactic character. As the turmoil of heresies resulted in clearer formulations of faith and practice, icons became more doctrinal and less lifelike. By the 14th century however, Iconography became less intellectual and doctrinal, and more emotional and mystical thus reflecting the great movement of mystical theology and allegorical Eucharistic interpretations of this period.

The role of icons in the Orthodox Christian's life extends from Church to home. The Mystical Supper or Eucharist is celebrated at the holy altar located in the sanctuary, which is separated from the nave by an iconostasis or icon screen. This divider is highly decorated with icons, and contains three doors through which clergy and acolytes pass during Divine Liturgy and other sacred services. The center one is larger, called the Royal Door, behind which the altar stands and can be seen by most of the congregation. The northern (left) door leads to the table where the gifts of bread and wine are prepared by the priest, and the southern (right) to the vestry. Processions exit the sanctuary from the northern door and enter through the southern, apart from the clergy who enter from the Royal Door. Four Icons on the iconostasis follow a prescribed order: Christ's icon is the first to the right of the Royal Door; the icon of the Mother of God is the first to the left of the Royal Door; the icon of St. John the Baptist is next to that of Christ; the icon of the saint in whose name the church is dedicated is next to that of the Mother of God. Other icons of saints complete the icon screen up to the side doors on which the two Archangels are depicted, Michael on the left and Gabriel on the right. Solemn processions with holy icons take place on saints' feast days, during Holy Week and especially on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, which celebrates the restoration of icons to their rightful place in Orthodox Christian worship after the Church's victory in the iconoclastic controversy.

In every Orthodox Christian home, there are icons of Christ, the Theotokos (Virgin Mother of God), and family patron saints. An oil or wax votive light is placed at the holy icons, and during family or private prayer, incense is burned symbolizing our prayers rising up to God. Whenever the pressures and paid of life become too heavy to bear by themselves, or the Orthodox Christian turns to God In joyous thanksgiving, prayers are offered before the holy icons - windows of heaven. Not something to look at, but to look through. ■

## IKONS IN RUSSIA

By Michael Klimenko

**T**he word ikon means image. In this sense every individual is an ikon of God. But the ikons which decorate the Orthodox Churches either in Greece, in Russia, in the United States or in any other country are special images. Their subjects are the persons of the Trinity, scenes from the life of Christ and the Theotokos, (the Virgin Mary). Further they represent scenes from the life of the Old and the New Testaments, Patriarchs and Saints venerated by the Orthodox believers. Today the ikons decorate not only the Orthodox churches for which they were painted, but also are exhibited in many museums in Russia, Germany, Switzerland, in New York and other countries and cities.

We may never know for sure the origin of ikon painting. The Canon of the Eighth Ecumenical Council in Nicaene in 787 stated that ikon painting was an established institution and tradition of the Church.

The defeat of the iconoclasts in the eighth century made the visible expression of Divinity possible. The Divine Logos became Man and became visible to all the world. The ikon is then the pictorial representation of the incarnated Logos. The visual art became the overriding factor in the life of the Orthodox Church.

The ikons are not meant to be a realistic picture, or a portrait of a real person. Rather they are meant to represent the heavenly vision of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The ikons are the prototype of man and the world that man will and must experience until the resurrection. They are thus a link between earth and heaven. The Orthodox believer sees in the ikon a window into sacred things.

In earlier centuries ikons were the Bible of the unlettered. They had the same function as the printed Word, i.e. the message and the preaching in the Protestant churches today. In the present days, the ikons are witness to the faith. In the teaching of the great Eastern theologian St. John of Damascus, ikons maintain mystery and, like sacraments, are vessels of divine energy and grace.

To Russia, the art of ikon painting came together with Christianity in the course of the tenth century from Greece. In 1988, not only the Orthodox Church, but the public at large in Russia and in many countries of the world celebrated the Millennium of Christianity in Russia.

From their first appearance in Russia, ikons were regarded as only religious art. The first ikon painters came from Greece. They continued the painting in the style as it was developed and established in their home country. Only gradually did the Russian painters develop their own style. The Russians, like the Greeks decorated their churches with frescoes, mosaics and painting on wood.

The center of early ikon painting in Russia was city of Kiev in today's Ukraine. The city of Kiev became known as the Mother of Russian cities. Ikons from Kiev are rare. Those extant show strong influence of their Greek examples.

When Kiev was conquered and destroyed by the Mongols in 1240, the ikon painters were scattered throughout the country, mostly to the North. Being protected by forests, there in the Northern regions, the Russian painters were trained. They began to develop their own style. There appeared various genuine Russian schools of ikon painting. One of the earliest schools was developed in Novgorod the Great.

In spite of the Canon of the Ecumenical Council, the style of ikon painting was never restricted by dogma. It was left up to the creative Imagination of the Individual painter or the ikon painting school to express their vision of God and Man. So it came then that ikons on particular subjects were never identical. While remaining unchanged in the main outline, ikons on the same subject show a remarkable variety of treatments. It was a free interpretation and expression of a painter's personality, his faith and skill that counted in his art of painting.

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Novgorod was an independent City Republic. It had strong trade connection with the Northern and Western European countries. The trade brought foreign Ideas, under influence of which the style of ikon painting changed rapidly. The Novgorod saints became more realistic as far as the Canon allowed and decidedly humanized. Their composition became more simple.

The Novgorod, the so-called Northern school, reached the height of its development at the turn of the fourteenth and during the fifteenth centuries. By that time there were no longer significant traces of Greek influence left. The new art of ikon painting acquired clearly marked national characteristics. The Novgorod art especially bears the imprint of a lively popular taste. The artists in Novgorod preferred faces of the saints of a well defined national type. The Novgorod ikons are the work of great painters. They were excellent colorists.

There were also schools of ikon paintings in Suzdal, Vladimir, Yaroslav, Pskov, even in faraway Kargopol and Arkhangelsk.

The most pronounced school of ikon painting developed in Moscow. There were ikon painters working in Moscow from the late 12th century. In a century and a half the Moscow painters established their supremacy over all the other schools in the country. After the Turks captured Constantinople (Tsars City, as the Russians called it) in 1453, Moscow began to claim for itself to be the center of the Orthodoxy. A bit earlier it became the capital of Russia. The painters from Greece and the Southern Slavic countries, Bulgaria and Serbia fled from the Turks and found refuge In Moscow. It was in Moscow that Russian ikon painting reached its heights. The Moscow painters transformed the Greek style out of recognition.

History has not preserved many names of ikon painters. The anonymity was due to the nature of the medieval society in which the life and work of an artist was not generally regarded as something that would find public appreciation or recognition. Painters had hardly any means to bring their names to the attention of the public.

In many instances the painters worked in teams. It could happen that one ikon was painted consecutively by several painters. As a rule they worked at the order of rich patrons, such as a prince or a monastery. Who commissioned the work was more important to be remembered than the masters who performed it.

Apart from this, the Christian virtue of humility did not encourage, and sometimes directly prohibited boasting of one's own name. Painters and craftsmen had to labor primarily for the glory of God alone. They could not always put their names onto the work they created. There was not much in the life of a common man that would warrant him to be mentioned in the annals of history. If he was not a mighty and "a pious Christian God-fearing ruler" or an equally "pious and God-pleasing" hierarch in the Church, or a famous wonderworking Saint, he did not have much social value and had to remain anonymous to society.

So it came that only the names of a very few truly outstanding ikon painters survived to reach us today. They were preserved in the historical chronicles of the time.

Three names of ikon painters from the Moscow school will be mentioned here: Theophanes (Russian Feofan) the Greek, Andrei Rublev and Dionysios of Moscow.

Feofan (died ca. 1406) came to Russia from Constantinople. His proud, austere dynamism and somber colors endowed his craftsmanship with inner power. In his early paintings there are the stern Byzantine origins of his art. While in Russia he tempered it with humanity and gentleness that were characteristic of his adopted country. Just like El Greco became a Spanish painter, so Feofan became a Russian painter.

Andrei Rublev (ca. 1360 - 1430) is considered the greatest ikon painter of Russian medieval time. It was said that Andrei Rublev had a certain affinity with his contemporary Italian artist Fra Angelico. The most known of Andrei's paintings is the famous Trinity Ikon painted around the year 1423 for the Saint Sergii Trinity Monastery. Now the ikon is exhibited In the Tretiakov Gallery in Moscow.



The three angels, seated at a low table, form a closely knit group that is impossible not to interpret as embodying the ideal of peace and harmony, hope, gentleness, and expectation. The composition revolves around the chalice on the table - the symbol of sacrifice. The three angels are engaged in a silent, but nevertheless very intensive conversation. This is expressed through their outstretched hands, inclination of their heads, and sorrow in their faces. The angel on the left with profound grief in his face points to the chalice (symbol of sacrifice) and, looking at the middle angel, silently asks for his consent to go to perform his mission - will you go to make this necessary sacrifice? The expression of his face is sad, as if to say: "I am sorry to ask for this sacrifice, but this is necessary". The angel on the right represents the power of the Holy Spirit. He gives the necessary strength and comfort. He will send his Spirit, the Comforter. His face is also sad. All the three faces are sad, pensive, but not miserable. They express humility, determination and effort. There is no conflict, no struggle in them. All three are imbued with a feeling of respect and mutual sympathy toward one another. There is conversation and reverie, subordination and equality at the same time in them. The light colors are blended wonderfully together.

In brief, this wonderful ikon is great art, a real masterpiece. It is greatly admired by everyone who views it.

The third painter to be mentioned here is Dionysios (1440 - 1508). He comes within Rublev's tradition. He strove to maintain the spirituality and the purity of Rublev's art of ikon painting. He, too, was fond of light, gay colors and generous line harmonies. But the faces of his saints no longer express the Rublevian strength of feeling. The colors have lost their vigor. The artist seems to have preferred washed-out tones.

Dionysios was the last great Ikon painter of the Russian medieval time. Soon the influences coming from the West would overshadow the genuine Russian art of ikon painting.

In conclusion, it must be said that it was the custom in the medieval times to decorate ikons heavily with jewels, gold, and other precious metals. Some ikons, like Rublev's famous Trinity, except for the faces and fingers of the angels, were heavily encrusted with thick layers of gold. The Soviet government, being in dire need of hard currency, ordered the Trinity Ikon along with all others cleared from the heavy crust of gold and placed many of them into museums of art for public viewing. ■







Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption  
Seattle, Washington