

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION

Studies in the Faith

The Interior of the Church



**GREEK ORTHODOX
CHURCH
OF THE
ASSUMPTION**

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THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

To those unfamiliar with the internal arrangements of an Orthodox Church building, a first encounter can be surprising, confusing and exciting. Passing through the door from the outside into the Narthex one is struck by several sights and scents which may be unfamiliar—lighted candles, icons depicting the Mother of God and her Divine Son, ...the senses are further delighted by color and scent...all these things create an ambience of holiness; for here, truly, is the Gate of Heaven, the very passage that leads us before the Throne of God.

Orthodox Worship: A Living Continuity with the Synagogue, the Temple and the Early Church by Benjamin Williams and Harold Anstall (pages 106-111).

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Introducing the Orthodox Church, by Fr. Anthony Coniaris—"What the Walls of the Orthodox Church Teach Us."

ORTHODOX ARCHITECTURE

The Orthodox Church building is nothing more than the architectural setting for the Liturgy. Originally, the homes of Orthodox Christians were used for this purpose. The history of the Church structure as we know it today did not begin to come into existence until the official toleration of Christianity by Constantine the Great in the year 313 A.D. In the fourth and fifth centuries, buildings were erected to facilitate baptisms (*baptistries*) and burials (*mausoea*) and to commemorate important events in the life of Christ and the Saints. However, it was the building designed primarily to celebrate the Eucharist that became the typical Christian structure, the Church as we think of it today.

THE BASILICA

By the fifth century, church architecture varied from one part of the Roman empire to the other. Churches in Greece, Syria, Italy and Egypt were likely to differ noticeably in their architecture. However, a common element to all was the basilica, a building that was a long rectangular structure. Usually these structures were divided into three aisles by rows of columns running parallel to the main axis, with a semi-cylindrical extension - an apse - at one end of the nave (eastern end). The altar always was placed in front of the apse. There was always a barrier separating the altar from the rest of the Church. In addition, there was the Narthex. The Narthex was just inside the entrance of the Church where the catechumens stood during the Liturgy of the Faithful.

The simple rectangular, horizontal structure of the basilica allowed for a "pull" or a "focus" toward the altar since that was the only part of the building that was not rectangular in structure.

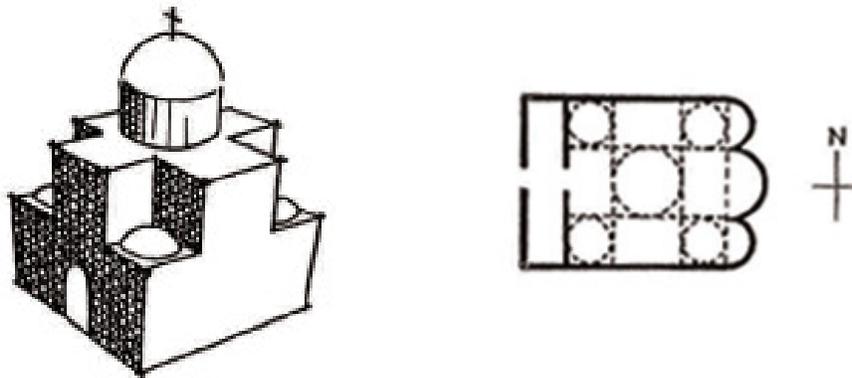
THE DOME

The dome on Orthodox Churches did not become established until the emperor Justinian built the Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople, otherwise known as Hagia Sophia, in the middle of the sixth century. This most beautiful Church was developed by the architects Anthemius and Isidorus. They inserted forty closely-spaced windows around the base of the dome. The dome was placed at the center of the basilica. On a sunny day, many described the dome as floating on a ring of light as the sun shone through the windows. The dome from

that time forward was established as a hallmark of Byzantine architecture and it infused Church design with a more mystical geometry. In a domed Church you are always conscious of this "hovering hemisphere" which gives the Church a definite vertical axis. Due to its structure and architecture, the dome became symbolic with the "dome" of heaven.

CROSS - IN SQUARE

Of the large number of Orthodox Churches incorporating the dome as part of its structure, the architecture type that became most prevalent is the cross-in square configuration. The cross-in square plan became most widespread and became the standard in the later ninth century after the iconoclastic controversy. This kind of church is a basilica on the first level and cruciform on the second level with a dome resting at the intersection of the arms of the cross. Smaller domes are also built on the four corners of the basilica. Please see the below schematics. ■



WHAT THE WALLS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH TEACH US

There are _____ dimensions to the interior of an Orthodox Church. The first is the _____ dimension. The second is the _____ dimension. Within these two dimensions the whole theology of the church is conveyed.

The church building is like a life boat; a place where heaven and earth become one; a place where we are _____ thereby strengthening and firming the gift of salvation bestowed upon us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

THE VERTICAL DIMENSION OF THE CHURCH

At the highest point of an Orthodox church, there is, by tradition, a _____. The first Orthodox church to have a dome was that of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Istanbul), built in the fourth century, through the Emperor _____'s influence.

In the interior of the dome is placed, by tradition, an icon of _____ (Pantocrator) looking down upon the congregation from above. The icon of Christ is at the _____ point in the church to reflect the fact that Christ is the _____ of the church and is its leader (Ephesians 1: 15-23), accepting the prayers and petitions of His faithful (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

The Sanctuary wall (Apse) has an icon of the "_____". The purpose of this icon is to express Christ's _____, to express the fact that Jesus was incarnate as fully God and fully man.

Our sanctification occurs in Jesus Christ through the sacraments (Eucharist) of the Church, in which Christ dwells. Through the Eucharist, Christ dwells in us who live in the world, who are part of the church militant!

The ceiling represents _____, the apse emphasizes the fact that earth was united to heaven through Christ's _____, the floor represents the _____ in which we dwell.

THE HORIZONTAL DIMENSION OF THE CHURCH

We enter into the church through the "_____". The Narthex serves many functions. It helps to remind us that we are entering into a place of _____. The icons in the Narthex help to remind us that we will be praying with _____, with the church _____, that we are entering a _____. The icons in the Narthex remind us of our call to _____ through the examples of the Saints and the depictions of Christ's life.

The "Nave" is our spiritual lifeboat where the _____ of the church _____ gives glory to God!

The Nave is separated from the altar by an _____. The icon screen is a relatively late development in Orthodoxy (eighth century). The icon screen is symbolic of the temple veil of the Old Testament which separated the "Holy of Hollies" from the remainder of the temple.

The icon screen again helps to remind us that the Saints of the church triumphant are _____ with us. Our purpose—one they have already attained—is one of salvation through sanctification. The icon screen usually has a second tier of icons depicting Christ's _____.

THE HOLY ALTAR

The Altar in an Orthodox Church always (by Tradition) faces _____. The altar is always _____ from the Nave to signify that it is suspended between Heaven and Earth and that its purpose is to lift us up to _____ through the teachings of the Gospel and the grace of the Sacraments, both of which emanate from the _____.

The tradition of placing Holy Relics in the consecrated altars came from the early church practice of celebrating liturgies over the _____ of the Saints on the anniversary of their deaths.

ANTIMENSION

Antimension means "in the place of a _____", meaning the Altar. It is a consecrated liturgical implement on which the Eucharist can be celebrated in places where there is no _____

altar. If the altar is consecrated, no antimension is actually needed for the Eucharist to be celebrated on it. However, the practice has prevailed for the Eucharist to be celebrated on an antimension whether the altar is con-

secrated or not.

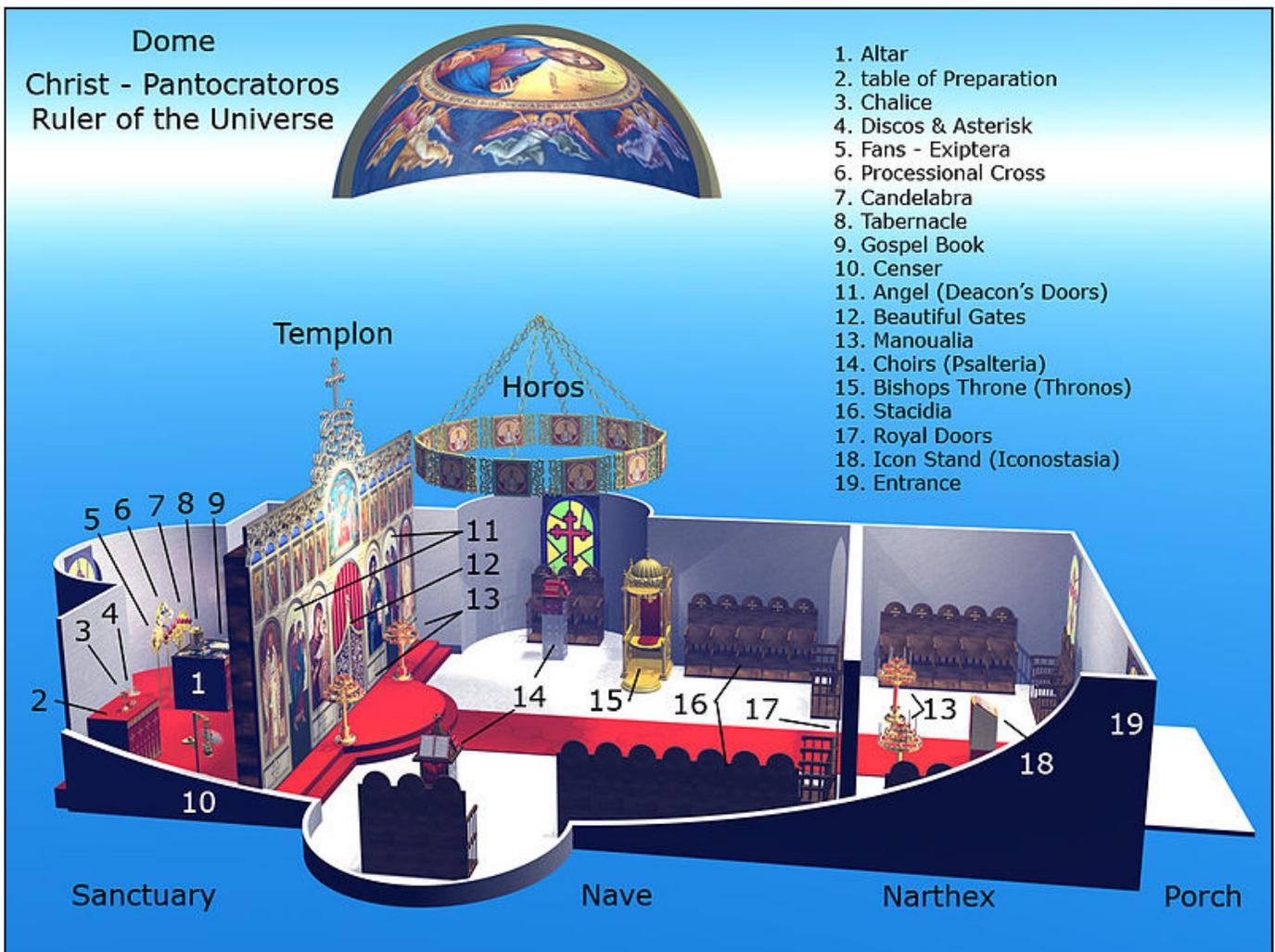
On today's antimensia are stamped icons, of which the principal one is that of the _____. Also, portions of relics of saints were by rule sewn or placed in pockets this being the practice by which an altar was, and is, consecrated. The antimension is _____ just like an altar.

PROTHESIS

Prothesis signifies the table on which the solemn preparation (*Proskomide*) of the _____ takes place. It is on the left of the altar, and it can be a separately standing ornamented small table or a wall apse. The inside of the apse is decorated with the scene of the _____.

DIAKONIKON

The diakonikon is a table which sits at the _____ of the altar, where by tradition priests keep their vestments and liturgical books.



SESSION CHECK LIST

- Attended class session
- Read “The Saints of the Orthodox Church” article, pgs. 84-90.
- Read Welcome to the Orthodox Church by Frederica Mathewes-Green, pgs. 147-156.
- Read The Orthodox Church by Timothy Ware, pgs. 257-266.

SESSION NOTES



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

ORTHODOX ART AND ARCHITECTURE

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Introduction. Anyone who witnesses an Orthodox liturgy for the first time will be struck by its frank appeal to the senses. The central actions of the Liturgy are, to be sure, the consecration and distribution of the bread and wine that constitute the Lord's Body and Blood. But the chanting and choral singing, the incense, the vestments and ritual movements of the priest and acolytes, and the images everywhere around are not mere embellishments. They are integral aspects of the whole liturgical "event" They reveal and celebrate its meaning.

It has been so for centuries. An old Russian chronicle relates that Prince Vladimir of Kiev (d. 1015) could not decide which faith to adopt for himself and his people until his envoys reported from Constantinople that they had witnessed services there: 'We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth;' they declared, "for on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss to describe it. We know only that God dwells there among men" This often-repeated account may be anecdotal, but it contains a valid observation: the Orthodox Church makes no sharp distinction in its worship between the spiritual and the aesthetic. One becomes aware of God's presence through the senses, in the experience of "splendor" and "beauty."

This emphasis on sensory involvement has its basis in the Orthodox and thoroughly Biblical conviction that it is the *whole world*, and not only man's soul, that will be transfigured - "saved" - when Christ establishes His Kingdom at the end of time. The Liturgy is the anticipation and conditional realization here and now of that promised end. Far from denying God's material creation, it sanctifies it. The Eucharist itself is proof of this. However, the beauty of the Liturgy is of a kind that is *consistent with the Church's vision of that transfigured world*.

This qualification is important. Many things loosely called "beautiful" in fact embody values symptomatic of the world in its unsanctified condition and consequently have no place in the Church. Such, to give an example, would be a picture, however artistically executed, that depicts a saint as physically attractive or mawkish. On the other hand, the beauty prefiguring God's Kingdom can seem strange or forbidding to those who do not partake of the deeper experience of the Church and therefore do not share its vision. One often hears people complain of the somber faces in icons. While the Church's worship appeals to the senses, it presupposes a canon of beauty that is compatible with the new life to which believers are called. The outstanding achievement of the sacred arts of Orthodoxy lies in their brilliant and creative response to the requirements of this canon.

The art* and architecture of the Orthodox Church came to maturity in the Christian Roman, or Byzantine, Empire and accompanied the faith to those countries that received their Christianity from Byzantium. It also exerted strong influence on the art of Western Christians until well into the thirteenth century. In the Orthodox world the fall of Constantinople in 1453 accelerated the development of national styles within the Byzantine tradition -Greek, Serbian, Russian, Bulgarian, Rumanian, Arabic-but also led to the gradual adoption of Renaissance and Baroque ideas from the West, until in the nineteenth century the Byzantine essence of Orthodox art was barely discernible beneath the Western overlay. In recent decades, however, orthodox artists have begun to recover their Byzantine heritage, just as Orthodox theologians have returned to the patristic sources of Orthodoxy.

ORTHODOX ARCHITECTURE

Origin. The Orthodox Church building is nothing more (or less) than the architectural setting for the Liturgy. Originally, converted houses served the purpose. The history of the church as a conspicuous structure begins with the official toleration of Christianity by Constantine the Great in 313, although there is evidence that sizeable churches existed before his time in some large cities. In the fourth and fifth centuries, buildings were erected to facilitate baptism (*baptistries*) and burial (*mausolea*) and to commemorate important events in the lives

* The word "art" conjures up associations and values that are irrelevant in our context, such as that of "self-expression". But there is no satisfactory alternative.

of Christ and the saints (*martyria*); but it was the building designed primarily to accommodate the celebration of the Eucharist that became the typical Christian structure - the *church* as we think of it today.

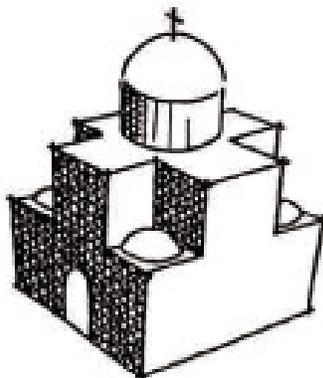
The Basilica. As early as the fifth century, church plans varied from one part of the Empire to another. A church in, say, Syria or Greece and one in Italy or Egypt were likely to differ noticeably. But most were basilicas; long rectangular structures divided into three or five aisles by rows of columns running parallel to the main axis, with a semi-cylindrical extension - an apse - at one end (usually the eastern) of the nave, or central aisle. The altar stood in front of the apse. A low barrier separated the *bema* - the area around the altar - from the rest of the church for the use of the clergy. Sometimes a transverse space - the transept - intervened between the aisles and apsidal wall. Just inside the entrance was the *narthex*, a chamber where the catechumens stood during the Liturgy of the Faithful. In front of the entrance was a walled courtyard, or *atrium*. The roof was raised higher over the nave than over the side aisles, so that the walls resting on the columns of the nave could be pierced with windows. From the beginning, less attention was paid to the adornment of the church's exterior than to the beautification of its interior.

The flat walls and aligned columns of a basilica define spatial volumes that are simple and mainly rectangular (except for the apse); they also are rationally interrelated and in proportion to each other, with a horizontal "pull" toward the *bema*, where the clergy would be seen framed by the outline of the apse. More dramatic spatial effects were made possible when vaults and domes, which had been common in baptisteries, *mausolea*, and *martyria*, were applied to churches.

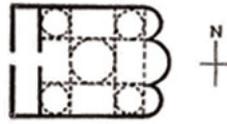
The Dome. The dome was put to its most spectacular use in Constantinople, in the emperor Justinian's great Church of the Divine Wisdom, Hagia Sophia, raised in a phenomenally short time, less than six years (532-537); for many centuries it was the largest church in Christendom. The architects, Anthemius and Isidorus, created a gigantic, sublime space bounded on the lower levels by colonnades and walls of veined marble and overhead by membranous vaults that seem to expand like parachutes opening against the wind. The climactic dome has forty close spaced windows around its base and on sunny days appears to float on a ring of light.

Hagia Sophia is sometimes called a "domed basilica," but the phrase minimizes the vast differences between the dynamism of its design and the comparatively static spaces of a typical basilica. No church would be constructed to rival Hagia Sophia; but the dome was established as a hallmark of Byzantine architecture (although basilicas continued to be built), and it infused church design with a more mystical geometry. In a domed church one is always conscious of the hovering hemisphere, which determines a vertical axis around which the subordinate spaces are grouped and invites symbolic identification with the "dome" of heaven.

Cross-In Square. Of the large number of Byzantine church plans incorporating domes, we shall consider the one that became most widespread. This is the "cross-in-square" plan, adopted in Constantinople in the later ninth century, after the Iconoclastic Controversy had ended (about which more will be said). In the simplest terms, this kind of church is cubical on the first level and cruciform on the second, with a dome resting on a cylinder at the intersection of the arms of the cross, and smaller domes or vaults over the four corners of the cube, between the arms of the cross. Schematically it looks like this:



The ground plan, if we add three apses on the east and a narthex on the west, looks something like this:



The chambers flanking the central apse on the north and south are the *prothesis* and *diaconicon* respectively. The former is where the priest prepares the Eucharistic elements before the Liturgy proper begins, and the latter is a place of storage for liturgical utensils, books, and vestments.

After the sixth century, Byzantine churches were of modest size but proportionately taller. In the cross-in-square and related plans, the geometric interplay of the spatial units around the domed core compensated for the loss of effects dependent on large dimensions. On the exterior, builders exploited the ornamental possibilities of the brickwork and stonework, producing intricate surface patterns. The overall effect inside and out was one of intimacy.

The Slavic Countries. Beyond the Empire, Byzantine plans were taken over with few changes or used as a point of departure for indigenous designs. In Serbia the "Rascian" style, popular until the fourteenth century, has a succession of bays, some domed, on a single axis, and an optional tower over the narthex. In Bulgaria a long barrel-vaulted or domed church, often without free-standing internal supports, was popular. In Russia the familiar "onion" dome was developed by the thirteenth century, perhaps in response to weather conditions (it sheds snow easily, preventing it from accumulating at the seam between the dome and the drum). Also in Russia, alongside churches of domed cubical shape, are "tent" churches, developed most energetically in the sixteenth century from native traditions of timber architecture. A tower with a huge steeple, its silhouette contrasting with the flat landscape, rises over the monocameral body of the church and is topped with a tiny lantern or dome: St. Basil the Blessed in Moscow's Red Square (actually not one church but a cluster of nine) has the best-known example. In Rumania several monastery churches (famous for the paintings on their exteriors) are long and narrow, with a single apse almost the full width of the church, and a single roof with a generous overhang. In all of these countries, churches more dearly Byzantine in type were also built.

Their diversity does not deprive Orthodox churches of a certain family resemblance. Most have a vaulted superstructure that establishes a "celestial" space overhead. Even more regularly, the interior walls are covered with paintings or mosaics and seem designed for this purpose, since their expanses are ordinarily kept free of sculptural projections such as engaged columns, pilasters, and heavy moldings—except in the case of the churches of Baroque or Neoclassical style. But the most obvious sign of an Orthodox interior is the *iconostasis*, or *templon*, the wall to which icons are affixed, which separates the sanctuary from the part of the church occupied by the congregation. An Orthodox church without an *iconostasis*, as those in Constantinople that were converted into mosques, seems oddly incomplete. This brings us to the subject of images in the Orthodox Church.

PAINTINGS AND MOSAICS

Historical Background. The history of the early Christian world was not planned for the convenience of art historians; the oldest preserved examples of Christian art date only from the late second or early third century. But the Orthodox Church holds the use of images to be an apostolic practice, and it attributes the earliest icons of the Virgin and Christ to Saint Luke. It also records that Christ created the first image of Himself by impressing His features on a piece of cloth the - *Mandyllion* - that was later enshrined in the city of Edessa. In the Orthodox view, the concept of the image is central to Christianity. We shall return to this point after reviewing some of the characteristics of early Church art.

Christian themes were initially expressed in the visual "language" of Roman art, which in late pagan times was made up of two interacting styles, a classical and an abstract. Greek artists in the fifth century B.C. had per-

fectured their knowledge of anatomy and created idealized human figures. Their Hellenistic successors mastered realism, extending the scope of art over the whole world of natural appearances. This ability to produce lifelike images was later used to satisfy the Roman desire for realistic portraits, paintings with an illusion of spatial depth, and sculptures commemorating historical events, such as military campaigns. (Exactly how much was owed by Roman art to Hellenistic art is a question that will not detain us.) This Greco-Roman classical tradition emphasized the physical, the measurable, the comprehensible. At odds with it was an abstracting style of uncertain origin, primitive but forceful, and keyed to realities transcending the world of appearances. This style distorted anatomy when distortion suited its ends; hence the eyes in a portrait may be abnormally enlarged, to indicate spiritual depth. It imposed a geometric order on its compositions, allowing nothing to appear casual or purposeless. It preferred frontality for its figures, arresting their movement and making them seen aware of the viewer. Finally the size and distinctiveness of its objects were regulated not by the laws of vision but by the relative importance of the objects, and so the illusion of spatial depth was absent.

Development. Christian artists availed themselves of both styles. The third-century paintings in the Roman catacombs, for example, are classical, while the contemporary paintings in a baptistry discovered at Dura Europus, in Syria, incline to the abstract. But gradually a normative synthesis emerged. Constantine's choice of Byzantium as his capital in the fourth century ensured that the major institutions of that city, the Court at the Church, would play a leading role in this evolution. The result was Byzantine art, which combines the classical respect for material form with the capacity of the abstract style to suggest the transcendental. In this way it is able to present a pictorial world in which the historical and the meta-historical, the temporal and the eternal, intersect. The early art of the Church was undeniably decorative, but its chief function was to instruct and elevate. The selection of themes from the Old and New Testaments and from sacred tradition was guided by the Church's unerring sense of what was dogmatically important. Representations of Christ, the Virgin, angels, and saints, shown looking at the viewer or engaged in some narrative action, were executed on the walls of churches and other buildings and on ecclesiastical and personal objects of almost every description. The images that were treated with special reverence and used in prayer were the icons. This word simply means "images" in Greek and was employed thus by the Byzantines; but in English it has come to mean the sacred images painted on panels, usually of wood. Icons were venerated out of love and respect for the people represented on them and because the sanctity of their subject matter set them apart from other material objects.

Early Byzantine Art. The way in which most themes were depicted soon became standardized, since the purpose of an image was not to display artistic originality but to reveal the subject's deeper, immutable meaning, which could be apprehended only under a form sanctioned by the Church's experience and made recognizable by common usage. This adherence to iconographic tradition did not inhibit artists from exercising their talents. It might even be argued that it freed them to do so. Byzantine art became the criterion of technical excellence and formal beauty. Among the most admired examples of early Byzantine art are the fifth- and sixth-century mosaics in Ravenna, Italy, and those of the sixth century in the isolated Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai. The deliberate, constructed shapes, bright colors, and shining surfaces of mosaic made it ideal for imparting a vision of timeless, unfading existence, and the medium was raised to its highest expressive level. The Transfiguration mosaic at Sinai, with its simple but powerful evocation of the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ, demonstrates how effectively the Byzantines could convey a profound message in visual terms.

Also at Sinai are over two thousand icons, including several from the sixth century. The fact that these mosaics and icons and that most other existing Byzantine works of early date are in geographic areas inaccessible to the Byzantine emperors in the eighth century explains why we can still see them: they escaped the hammers and bonfires of the Iconoclasts, or "image breakers."

The Iconoclastic Controversy. A long-standing feeling in certain quarters of the Church that the veneration of images amounted to idolatry was given violent outlet in the year 726 or 730 (the date is uncertain), when Emperor Leo III banned all images of Christ that showed him in human form. The bloody conflict that ensued

did not end until 843, when the cause of the Iconoclasts was finally lost. The Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) and such saintly theologians as John Damascene and Theodore Studite defended image veneration and in so doing clarified the principles behind it. Images of Christ constituted the "test case," but at stake was the fate of all Christian images depicting the human form.

The debate was too intricate to be reviewed here except in briefest outline. The Iconoclasts did not grasp the subtleties of the relationship between an image and its prototype, the thing or person of whom it is an image. A prototype and its image are distinct substances, or entities; their similarity is owed to the fact that they share a single likeness. To venerate an image is to venerate not its substance but the shared likeness, and through it, the prototype. Beyond this lay the problem of whether God is representable. Here the Iconoclasts betrayed a deficient understanding of the Incarnation, which is why the Orthodox viewed Iconoclasm as a summation of earlier Christological heresies, and why the controversy was much more than a squabble about pictures. The Iconoclasts argued that any image depicting God in human form either omits His divine nature, since this is infinite and "un-circumscribable" (a fact that neither side questioned), or confuses it with His human nature; and either outcome is impious, since Christ's two natures are both distinct and inseparable (another fact that neither side questioned). To this it was replied that if Christ's two natures were not separated or confused when combined in His person, it makes no sense to say that they can be separated or confused in any image of His person. The image does not contain His natures-to do this it would have to be of the same substance as the prototype-but merely His likeness. It became evident that what the Iconoclasts were arguing against was not the possibility of an image of a person in whom the divine and human natures are combined yet distinct and inseparable, so much as the possibility of the very existence of such a person. They were balking at the paradox of God become Man.

Icon: the Orthodox Definition. The Orthodox stressed the role played by the icon in our salvation. Man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27) but allowed that image, and with it the world, to be corrupted. God assumed a fully human nature without ceasing to be fully God and thereby restored the image not just ethically, through His teachings, but in His whole person, as is proven by His bodily resurrection. An icon of Christ affirms the reality of that reconciliation of the human and the divine and enables us to contemplate the person who is the model for our *theosis*.

The controversy resulted in the sharpening of certain other ideas. The image is equivalent to Scripture as a revelation of the truth. The image bears witness to the sanctification of the matter by the Incarnation. A valid image is one that is faithful to its prototype.

This last point is illustrated by the history of Byzantine art. Fidelity to a *sacred* prototype means fidelity to a *transfigured* reality, and this fact rules out "photographic" realism, which would merely reproduce the likeness of the world in a state of corruption. Only in the ascetic and liturgical life of the Church is the world transfigured, and only in the iconographic tradition of the Church can one find the visual formulas appropriate to that higher reality. It is not necessary that an image duplicate precisely the colors, shapes, and composition of an accepted formula; but whatever changes are made must conform to, and confirm, the true meaning of the subject, and this presupposes an artist who is immersed in the life of the Church. An image changed to suit an individual's taste is as dangerous as a doctored Scriptural text.

Revival of Iconography. After Iconoclasm and during the Macedonian Dynasty (867-1056) the art of the Church was revitalized. The period was marked in part by the study of antiquity. Just as Church writers were making use of rhetorical devices borrowed from classical literature, artists looked to the art of the classical past for ideas on how to enrich their visual vocabulary. But the adopted motifs were thoroughly "Christianized" and brought into harmony with the purpose of Church art.

Iconographic Themes. Also at this time, the concept of imagery was extended to the church interior as a whole, which was conceived as an image of the cosmos. A theologically and aesthetically coherent scheme was worked out in conjunction with the cross-in-square plan, which provided the ideal "hierarchy" of spaces and surfaces. Portrayed against a field of gold suggestive of heaven and eternity, Christ Pantocrator, the Almighty, looked down upon His world from the central dome. Below Him, extending into the drum of the dome,

were angels and prophets, His attendants and witnesses. In the quarter-sphere of the main apse, midway between the dome and ground level, was the Theotokos, Birth-giver of God, placed there as the link between heaven and earth. Below her, on the apsidal wall but visible over the altar, figured the Communion of the Apostles, exemplar of the Eucharist, with Christ as the priest and angels as acolytes. Lower than the dome but on the upper level was the Feast cycle, comprising major scenes from the life of Christ (such as the Annunciation, Nativity, Presentation in the Temple, Baptism) and one devoted to the *Theotokos*, her Dormition (*Koimesis*) * These scenes not only recapitulated the Church year but also formed a collective image of the Holy Land. On the lower wall surfaces were frontal figures of saints, celestial counterparts of the assembled worshippers. Although the number of subjects increased with time, this arrangement became the norm, with adjustments for variations in the architectural setting, and to this day Orthodox churches use it as a guide.

Stylistic developments. Despite a continuity of purpose, Byzantium's long artistic history has distinguishable phases. In the later eleventh century the human form lost the somewhat heavy proportions of the previous two centuries and became slender and "spiritualized." In the twelfth century, when Byzantine art was in vogue far beyond the borders of the Empire, the style was flat, linear, and progressively agitated; and in mid-century the strong expression of sorrow appeared in connection with such themes as the Descent from the Cross and the Lamentation. More subjects than before, all of liturgical importance, were given a place on the walls of churches.

Palaeologan Period. At the end of the twelfth century the linear style began to give way to a more monumental one, with bulkier, more placid forms. The Latin capture of Constantinople in 1204 caused a temporary disruption, forcing the artists of the city to flee to outlying regions in search of Orthodox patronage. Serbia and probably Bulgaria, as well as Byzantine-held territories, were the beneficiaries of this exodus. The monumental style was now developed further with the creation of spacious landscape settings, robust architectural backdrops, and facial expressions of great dignity and gravity. After Constantinople was retaken in 1261, this style, now called "Palaeologan" after the last of the Byzantine dynasties, passed through several stages—too many, in fact, to be described here. Generally Palaeologan art represented the world as wondrously animated by the divine presence. Alive to material beauty, it could have gone the way of Western art (which it in some ways presaged) and focused more sharply on the raw data of the senses, but it remained consecrated to its sacred aims.

The Fourteenth Century: The Iconostasis. It was apparently in the fourteenth century that the *iconostasis*, or *templon*, assumed an appearance like the one we know. Previously it had been a colonnade with curtains, and the images were confined to the horizontal beam. Now icons were placed between the columns. The structure grew taller, in extreme cases reaching the ceiling. The icons customarily included the Twelve Feasts and a *Deisis* (Christ flanked by the Theotokos and St. John the Baptist), in addition to the Theotokos and Christ on either side of the central door and, in the same rank, the "local" saint or feast. In Russia the iconostasis became very elaborate, eventually constituting a history of salvation, beginning with the Old Testament forefathers and ending with Christ and the saints in heaven. The icons were arranged in five or more tiers.

An iconostasis has a dual significance. It marks the border between the heavenly and the terrestrial, represented by the sanctuary and the church proper, respectively. In this sense it is analogous to the "veil" that concealed the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem. But it also symbolizes, by means of the subject matter of its images, the *union* of the two realms, accomplished in the Incarnation.

After the Turkish Occupation. For some time after the Turkish conquests the leading patrons of Orthodox art in the Balkans were the monasteries. Among Greek painters of the sixteenth century, those from Crete (then under Venetian rule) were the most active. The "Cretan School" followed Palaeologan examples and could on occasion be austere conservative; but it was also affected by Western art, through exposure to Renaissance

* These feasts and seven others Transfiguration, Raising of Lazarus, Entry into Jerusalem, Crucifixion, Resurrection (*Anastasis*), Ascension, and Pentecost—make up what the Church calls the *Dodecaorton*, or Twelve Feasts.

and Baroque engravings. Western influence led to greater realism (and sentimentalism) and to the adoption of heterodox motifs (such as the kneeling pose to signify adoration) and compositions (such as Christ emerging from His tomb holding a banner, as a Resurrection image, in place of the traditional and theologically more instructive Descent into Hell).

The pace of Westernization, which occurred also in Russia, quickened in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the nineteenth century, after the Balkan countries won their independence, the trend was not reversed. Some artists hewed to the ancient ways, contemptuous or ignorant of rosy cheeks and vaporous clouds, but they were looked upon as hopelessly old fashioned and were never favored with the "big" commissions. Yet it is noteworthy that in the four centuries we have been discussing, Orthodox artists never really entered the Western mainstream.* This fact may point to a deep, subconscious ambivalence on their part. They were, after all, trying to habituate themselves to a visual language that had been invented to express values opposed to those of their own religious background.

Late in the nineteenth century European critics began extolling the virtues of Byzantine art, seeing in it the anticipation of modern ideas such as those in Post-Impressionism. They remained unaware of the religious reasons for its existence, however. At the same time, the art historians who were putting the study of Byzantine art on a sound scholarly footing were beginning to explore its religious content. But their findings were descriptive, not prescriptive; and they had few immediate effects on the Church's thinking.

THE PRESENT

Revival of Byzantine Art. A return to forms expressive of the ascetical and liturgical experience of the Church began in earnest after World War II. A very important artist in this regard was the outspoken Fotis Kontoglou (d. 1965), also famous in Greece as a writer, who had begun painting in the "old" style in the twenties. Another was the Russian Leonid Ouspensky, resident in Paris, and active after 1942. Both men were convinced that Orthodox art must first "come home" by disregarding the worldly clamor for realism or for whatever style happens to be in fashion; and that, having learned again to "feast with the eyes" it would be able to fulfill its sacred responsibility in a way "always new," like the Orthodox faith itself.

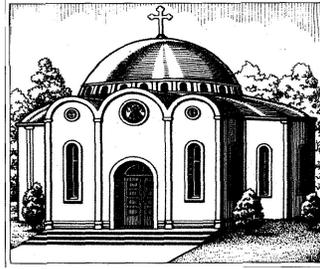
Their impassioned advocacy of the older tradition met with opposition from many, including churchmen. But in the fifties the tide turned, and the effects were soon felt in our country. Orthodox parishes of every ethnic derivation are now commissioning paintings and mosaics from artists working in a more authentically Orthodox mode.

Orthodox Art in America. The first generation of Orthodox churches built in this country naturally corresponded to what the earliest Orthodox immigrants thought a church should look like. For those of Greek origin, this often meant a long nave, a single dome, and a twin-towered facade with columned porch and classical pediment, features prevalent in Greece at the turn of the century. This time-honored division of the plan into narthex, church proper, and sanctuary with *prothesis* and *diaconicon* areas was observed. Churches of the last two decades have retained this division, which is dictated by liturgical needs, but have discarded most of the "historical references" that are not Byzantine, such as the pedimented facade. A church of distinctive appearance has resulted, in which Byzantine forms are interpreted freely, and of which an ample dome and rather squat proportions - like those of sixth-century churches - are the most characteristic elements.

No one would claim that all of the recent efforts in Orthodox art and architecture have been successful. Each case must be judged on its own merits. Certainly the test is not archaeological accuracy, which in any event would be impossible. Nor should Byzantine-inspired forms be used merely to assert the Church's historical identity. A church and the images in it must create an environment in which the Liturgy can be realized in all

* El Greco's career unfolded in a Roman Catholic milieu. But it may be no accident that this Cretan artist's work is not susceptible to neat placement in the scheme of Western developments.

its depth. This is their primary function. The Byzantine tradition has indispensable lessons to offer on how this can be done. It would have been impossible to predict even fifty years ago the almost instinctively positive response to that tradition observable now in most communities. It is an opportune time for Orthodoxy to make that essential part of its past a vital force in its present life. ■



SELECTED OLDER MONUMENTS OF ORTHODOX ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Church of St. Demetrius, Thessaloniki (Greece). (Architecture 5th century; burned in 20th century; rebuilt. Mosaics 7th century.)

Church of San Vitale, Ravenna (Italy). (Architecture and mosaics 6th century.)

Church of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Turkey). (Architecture 6th century; mosaics 9th-13th centuries.)

Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai (Egypt), basilica. (Architecture and mosaics 6th century)

Cave monasteries of Cappadocia (Turkey). (Paintings 9th century and later.)

Monastery church at Daphni, Attica (Greece). (Architecture and mosaics *circa* 1100.)

Church of Hagia Sophia, Kiev (Ukraine, U.S.S.R.). (Architecture, mosaics, frescoes 11th century and 12th century) Cathedral at Cefalu, Sicily (Italy). (Norman architecture; Byzantine mosaics 12th century)

Church of St. Panteleimon, Nerezi (Yugoslav Macedonia). (Architecture and frescoes 12th century)

Monastery church at Sopocani, Serbia (Yugoslavia). (Architecture and frescoes 13th century)

Chapel at Boiana (Bulgaria). (Frescoes 13th century) Monastery church of the Chora ("Kariye Djami"), Constantinople (Turkey). (Architecture, mosaics, frescoes 14th century)

Church of the Holy Apostles, Thessaloniki (Greece). (Architecture and mosaics 14th century)

Churches at Mistra (Greece). (Architecture and frescoes 13th-15th century)

Church of the Transfiguration, Novgorod (U.S.S.R.). (Architecture and frescoes 14th century)

Monasteries of Dionysiou, Megisti Lavra, and Stavronikita, Mount Athos (Greece). (Architecture 10th century and later; frescoes 16th century)

Churches of Humor and Moldavia (Rumania). (Architecture and frescoes 16th century)

Church of St. Basil the Blessed, Moscow (U.S.S.R.). (Architecture 16th century)



Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption
Seattle, Washington