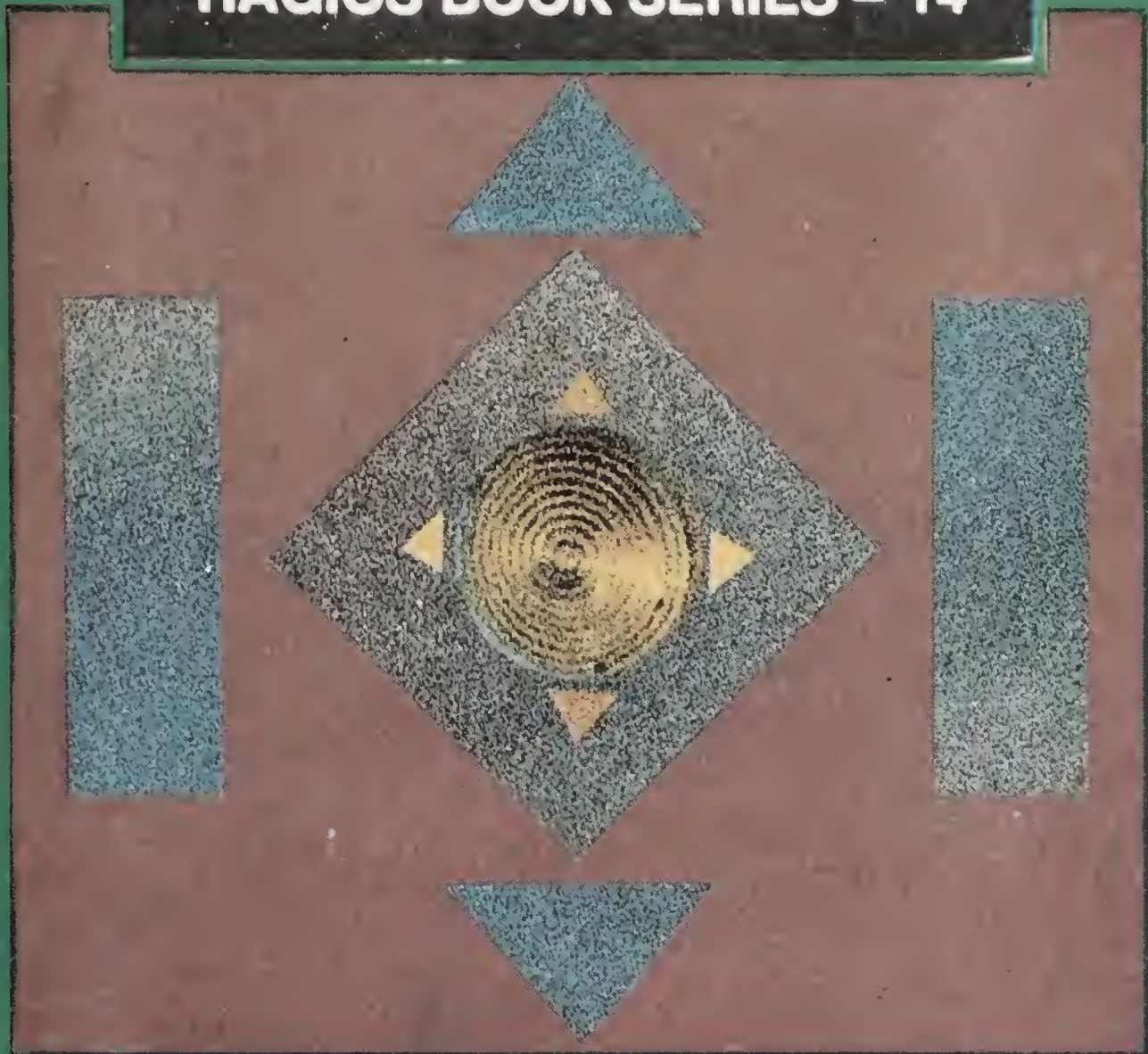


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# THE ICON AND ITS THEOLOGY

Rev. Fr. MATHEW VAIDYAN



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Hagios Book Series—14

**THE ICON  
AND ITS THEOLOGY**

(English)

## THE ICON AND ITS THEOLOGY

Study

by **Rev. Fr. K. L. Mathew Vaidyan**

Karippottu Kizhakkedathu

Thazhakara P. O., Mavelikara-690102

Phone: 36096

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## Foreword

The Christian faith can be expressed in many ways. The iconographic tradition of the Church is meaningful like other expressions of faith such as scripture, doctrines, creeds and liturgy. An icon is theology in colour. It is contemplation in colour. What word announces in written letters, iconography sets forth in colour. The veneration of icons is not idol worship. Icons act as a window open to the heavenly mysteries. Christian worship surpasses the levels of our intellect and reason, moving from the textual to the cultic level. An icon denotes a communion of the visible and invisible members of the Church. It is more than an aesthetic entity. It manifests the love and beauty of the Creator and the Creation. The mysteries of the transfigured cosmos are revealed to the believer through icons. An icon is the meeting place of eternity and time. History proves that the icon declares victory of monastic piety over imperial authority and intellectual arrogance. I wish icons today could become a common tradition of humanity as a whole.

I submit this humble work to the St. Petersburg Theological Academy in Russia where I stayed and studied for two years (1977–1979) as a guest of the Russian Orthodox Church. I am grateful to Dr. Samuel Chandanappally and to Prof. Jose Parakkadavil for their sincere words of appreciation. I am greatly indebted to the beloved sponsors in Kuwait and to Rev Fr. Abraham Ipe Mangat Cor Episcopa. Yes, well done, Chris Printers and thanks a lot.





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# **The Proponent of Comfort Literature and the Theologian of Reconciliation**

**Dr. Samuel Chandanappally**

The collection and distribution of ideas form an integral part of the universal goals of education. The 'feudal lordships' who are very particular not to impart the acquired knowledge are not venerated by the modern generation. Knowledge increases as it is shared. Therefore, it is one of the primary lessons of natural etiquette to return the acquired knowledge back to the society. Whatever man has taken from the church or the society he is committed to give it back in multiples. With such individuals, God is pleased. The society eagerly awaits for their birth.

When I went through the manuscripts of the seventeen books written by Rev. Fr. Mathew Vaidyan, my thought turned this way. He is a young priest experiencing the bliss of the soul by sharing the novel ideas acquired through incessant learning and literary askesis. He didn't lose the temper and goodness of his mother-tongue even if he had to undergo theological higher studies in foreign universities. The stream of Fr. Vaidyan's thinking is crystalclear and well-thought. This curious young priest is not in the habit of swallowing the ideas of other language. It is his in born nature to arrive at his own inferences evaluating from the contradicting poles of reasoning and faith. Reading the series of books written by Fr. Mathew Vaidyan never ends in loss of time. On the other hand it elevates the chaotic. Pilgrim lives to the shore of optimism and life after life. The aim of a good writer is nothing other than this.

The thought systems and visions of Fr. Mathew Vaidyan deserve deep study. If we re-gather the main contents of one

book, it becomes another book. Here I wish to point out only the core and pulse of them.

Putting it in a single verse, Fr Mathew Vaidyan is the proponent of Comfort Literature and the theologian of Reconciliation. The so-called Comfort Literature gives relief, courage and hope to human souls. The Theology of Reconciliation reconciles materialism and spirituality, heaven and earth and even the creation at large. This scholarly genius handles both of them at the same time. The sincere and experiential words of the writer comforts the reader, convict him about the vain glories of the world and inspire him to fly upto spiritual realms inheriting eternal bliss. The author has a mature theological methodology. Most of his writings are based on the philosophical, intellectual and devotional traditions of the Eastern Church Fathers. He hasn't forgot to interpret the valuable wisdom of great people relevant to the contemporary generation. He is convinced about the linguistic limitations in analysing Eternal Truth. God is incomprehensible. The reality is beyond conception, perception, explanation, and articulation. The enquiry of human-being based on his reason, intellect and philosophies can never satisfy the quest for reality. The spiritual experience of an individual has four-fold realm, namely, faith, transfiguration, peace and witness. Man has to recognize the limitations of reason, turn to the revelations of God and grow in accordance with the revelations through his faith. This world manifests the glory of the Creator. The author of this book exclaims, "Oh, marvellous creation, if man could see you as the temple of God!"

Those who try to grasp the mysteries of reality and interpret the meaning of the universe on the basis of atheistic assumptions became desperate. Such a prophetic warning is given by the author of this series of books. He observes the Kirillian photography, the Ozone layer surrounding the earth, the Chloro-Flouro-Carbons which cause dangerous holes in the Ozone layer and other phenomenons of the earth with keen interest. Each and every chapter of these books assert the need for a spiritual code of conduct to humanity. The author

appeals to work for a new society, co-ordinating the head, heart and hands of human beings. Holiness, divine wisdom and manual labour are the marks of the members of an ideal society.

The dynamic human presence on the earth and the heavens is portrayed by Fr. Mathew Vaidyan. Man is called to be a blessing for the whole creation. The divine calling has an intention. Man should stand in between God and world, participating in both, transfiguring the world for the glorification of God. The presence of man should sanctify this universe. Human beings have a mediatory function. Science can change this world, technology can change this world, but the real and deep change is made through prayer. It is for the glory of God, man lives and works. The message of the author to the modern generation continues: man should grow continuously and infinitely, in holiness, goodness, worship and ethics. Have faith in good values, transfer the good values and suffer for the good values. Thus life becomes meaningful.

Exhortations of conscientization for a responsible society can be seen in the pages of these books. The subject of spirituality and social commitment is dealt with in detail. The first lesson of education is to acknowledge the limitations of knowledge. If the intellect is not saturated by devotion, it is not the right type of intellect.

The 'isms' which pin together only the head and hands will have to surrender-the author holds on to this view re-calling his experiences in Russia. Knowledge of the natural laws must be saturated by admitting the imperfections of such knowledge. Man's consumption of resources must be controlled. Pleasures of one's life should not kill his soul. Worship without sacrifice is irrelevant. Individuals with arrogance can never flame up the image of God in them, All kinds of selfishness, exploitation avarice and mis-use of knowledge are the cause of destruction.

What we need today is Simple Christianity without any kind of boasting. The Holy Fools in the Russian Church History have great relevance today. The author is very much inspired

by Philocalia, the documentary collections about Orthodox Spirituality.

The definition given by Fr. Mathew Vaidyan to Theology is worth listening: 'There is a halo on the face of each person. Theology is the process of exploring the origin of this halo.' This process is not mere exercise of lips or textual analysis. Theology should reach the experiential level from both the emotional and intellectual levels. Words, silence, contemplation and rituals are all helpful to this process. The walls which separate the Hindu, the Muslim, the Sikh and the Christian are to be broken in this experiential level. The search for the common source of this halo leads us to the unity of reconciliation. To this unity of reconciliation the society is invited by the author. The disunity in textual level should be replaced by the unity in cultic level.

A mature human being is one who stick on to the creeds and ideologies giving strength, hope and peace and at the same time respect other creeds and ideologies which impart strength, hope and peace to others. The Theology of Reconciliation is the spirituality of maturity. The emphasis given to different sources of the Bible are to be considered by Christians with equal importance. The general message of religious books are to be taken collectively. Often 'Canon within the Canon' becomes dangerous. The Theology of Reconciliation is the remedy for fanaticism. All kinds of fanaticism are to be thrown out. This Theologian of Reconciliation criticizes the tendencies of some social reformists to neglect worship and of some other religious people to neglect social transformation. We must not hesitate to transform the church and society accepting dynamic insights. Advocating a classless social order, Fr. Mathew Vaidyan is building a bridge between the present and the future affirming the eschatological realm of the perfection of creation. Simple charity of today should lead to perfect charity of tomorrow, says the author. Integration of self-less love is the basis of a well-built society.

In the early church, the room attached with the holy altar was called Diakonikon and this was the centre for charity works.

The author pictures this centre as the text book of the Theology of Reconciliation. And what is the manifesto of this theology? The daily routine of the Basilian monastic order which compiled eight hours' prayer, eight hours' sleep and rest, eight hours' work is pictured as the manifesto for the Theology of Reconciliation. The reconciled society is that which is based on justice, love and glorification of the Creator. The real wealth of the church is the holiness of its members. The one beyond time and space took matter in the salvific and redemptive plan of God. This is the service of reconciliation. The mediums, signs symbols and words are the factors of reconciliation. God is unknown in ousia but known in the energeia. The mysteries of God will be revealed only to 'the initiated'. Man's union with Christ is undefinable and mystical. The Incarnation of Christ is the service of reconciliation. The sanctification of the world through the Church is the service of reconciliation. The part of the sacramental mysteries of the church is also the service of reconciliation. In the church's life of worship the synagogue worship and the temple worship of the Jews were co-ordinated. This is the Theology of Reconciliation. The communion of the visible church, and the invisible church is an experience of reconciliation.

How ecumenism becomes the service of reconciliation? Ecumenism in space should be replaced by ecumenism in time. Real ecumenism is the unity of time beyond this visible world. Here the walls of all man-made organizations are broken. Here unity is restored with the faith and practices of the former generation. The icon used by the Orthodox Churches as the medium of worship is itself the Theology of Reconciliation, says Fr. Mathew Vaidyan. Icons are the 'theology in colour'. Icon is the centre of reconciliation between the heaven and the earth. Icons are made through years of meditation and contemplation. They act as the window for vision of the Kingdom of God. The cross and the altar represent the Theology of Reconciliation. The cross is the sign of victory over self, circumstance and death. The presence of the cross itself is the incessant gospel message to the world. The tri-colour combination of the altar represent the Theology of Reconciliation. The red-colour coverage on the altar symbolizes

the sky and the solar system of the universe. The greenish coverage represents the earth and its biosphere, The white coverage denotes the church cleaned from the gibberish of sin through the salvific blood of the Lamb of God. All these factors assembled in the altar denote the harmony of the creation in Christ. The Holy Eucharistic Bread submitted as the fruit of man's labour is the Theology of Reconciliation. The perfection of the harmony is in the Holy Eucharist in which life is surrendered, transfigured and shared.

In brief, the theological system of Fr. Mathew Vaidyan constitute explanations and interpretations based on ecclesiological framework of the Eastern Christian Tradition. Fr. Mathew Vaidyan has a bright record of excellent service as the Professor of Orthodox Theological Seminary Kottayam, Principal of St. Paul's Mission Training Centre Mavelikara, Chief Editor of three publications namely Orthodox Youth, Doothan and Pawrasthya Tharam, General Secretary of Orthodox Christian Youth Movement and General Secretary of the Orthodox Church Clergy Association. He has gained much repute within a short period. He is an efficient organizer, orator, writer and a scholar admired by many people. The seventeen books written by Fr. Mathew Vaidyan can be rightly called a valuable treasure for Malayalam literature and Malankara Church. His life and study in Russia for a period of two years and his wide experiences in many other foreign countries helped him to complete this magnifiscent job. I wish wide receptibility to these valuable writings which convey information and enjoyment to the lovers of wisdom both Christian and non-Christian.

The writings of Fr. Mathew Vaidyan are the gold, myrrh and frankincense reconciling the earth and the heaven. I submit this series of books to the contemplative minds. Let the fragrance of these books renew the church and the society.

[Dr. Samuel Chandanappally is the honorary director of Ceedees Oriental Research Institute for Human Resources Development with its headquarters at Chandanappally.]



# The Genius of Positive Thinking

Prof. Jose Parakadavil

A talented orator conquering the audience, a writer who interprets deep spiritual principles suited to the common mass, a theologian who guides the pilgrims who search the depth and width of divine knowledge— Rev. Fr. Mathew Vaidyan is reputed in these manifold ways. It is a joyful task to introduce this multi-faced genius to the readers.

□ You have fulfilled a number of official duties in the Malankara Church. Will you please elucidate the main ones?

I worked as Professor of Theology in the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam. At present, I am working as the Principal of St. Paul's Mission Training Centre Mavelikara with the special initiative taken by Dr. Geevarghese, Mar Osthathios Metropolitan. I am the chief editor of three Church magazines namely, Orthodox Youth, Doothan and Pawrasthya Tharam. I was the first publisher of 'Purohithan' the official organ of the Orthodox Clergy Association. It was with the special interest of Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios Metropolitan, that I worked as the first General Secretary of the clergy association of the Orthodox Church. Later, Fr. M. A. Mathai (Dr. Mathews Mar Severius Metropolitan) was appointed in this post. I worked as the general secretary of the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement for a few years when Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios Metropolitan was its president. At that time, Fr. George Kurien (Geevarghese Mar Coorilose Metropolitan) was the general secretary of the Student Movement of the Church. Our joint efforts were a boon to the youth. We tried to bring a spiritual awakening among the young generation. It was in this period that the leaders of syndesmos, the world Orthodox Youth Organization, paid their first visit to India. I was invited as a guest speaker to the world General Assembly of syndesmos which took place at the Valamo

monastery near Helsinki in 1980. I continue my service as a member of the Church Managing Committee, Planning Committee and Publication Committee

You have extended your service to other areas outside the church. A brief description?

In addition to my official duties in the church, I use to engage in social activities. All Kerala Balajana Sakhyam helped me to nourish the interest in social activities from my childhood days. I was a Union President and Central Committee member of the Sakhyam. I got the opportunity to work as the Patron of Sakhyam Mavelikara Union with Prof. Kozhuvalloor M.K. Cherian. With active enthusiasm I give leadership to sick aid ministry, development projects and house-building assistance programmes for the poor.

Naturally it seems that you have served as parish vicar in the same period?

Surely. I worked as vicar in the following parishes: Mavelikara Kallumala St. Gregorios, Kottarcavu St. George, Vazhuvady Mar Baselius, Kallimel St. Thomas, Puthiakavu St. Mary's Cathedral, Kunnam St. George, Aranoottimangalam St. Kuriakose and also in the parishes of Lucknow, Allahabad and Rae Bareilli in outside Kerala.

You have made a number of foreign trips?

As the representative of the Orthodox Church I participated in a number of conferences. As a convention speaker I visited many countries. I visited the Gulf countries four times delivering series of sermons in the following centres: Kuwait, Ahmadi, Muscat, Dubai, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, Ras-al-Khaimah, Um-al-Quain, Dibba, Fujairah, Khorfakan, Doha, Dukan, Bahrain. Also I could visit countries like Russia, Italy, Sweden, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Armenia, Georgia, Ukrain and Poland.

What is your opinion about the fruitfulness of Convention Speeches?

I Consider it fruitful. Still I work in this field because it gives me satisfaction.

A prophetic zeal and vitality is seen in your sermons. What are the topics you like most?

In addition to biblical subjects I deal with the problems of environment, the phenomenons of nature, Kirillian photography, the halo in individuals, the immorality of mankind and other related subjects. I use to criticize crucially men's pride, vain glory, avarice and sensual pleasures ignoring the message of simplicity and moral values. The central theme of my message is the need for a spiritual code of conduct. Crisis is the path to progress. In the midst of crisis of and tribulations we have to keep our sanctity keep the commandments in the Word of God and grow in good deeds. I am very particular to remind the dangers of loose morality and life without self-control.

Please give a brief description of your writings.

'The Holy Fools' include the history and characteristics of the saintly heroes in the Russian Church known by this name. The books in the Divya Bodhanam Series 'Vedasathra Veedhiyil' and 'Thinking about God' are notes prepared for seminary students in theological subjects. 'Theology and Mission' discusses both mission and theology in the Indian philosophical context. The reflections of theological ideas in the veneration of icons are contained in the book 'The icon and its Theology'.

'God, Man, Community' is the analysis of social teachings relevant in the Indian, context. 'Sathyathinte Thoonukal' is a brief biographical sketch and messages of the early Church Fathers. 'Prakasavalayam' is the collection of my selected sermons. Articles on spirituality and social commitment mostly from the editorials in 'Orthodox Youth' are included in 'Adhyatmikathayum Samuhyaprathibadthathayum.' Contributions of a few giants in the field of Russian literature are analysed in 'Russian Sahithyathile Pavizhamuthukal'. My own experiences in the Russia of Breshnev's period are discussed in the book 'Russiayil Randu Varsham.' 'Viswasa Paadangal is the study of the faith, practices and traditions of the Orthodox Church. 'Nirappinte Daivasasthrom' is an anthology of theologically important subjects. Old Testament insights together with Bible quiz are

included in 'Vedavijnanamamanjari.' Illustrations, incidents, experiences and stories full of moral insights and positive thinking are the contents of the book 'Subhachinthakal.' It can be said that it belongs to the branch of 'Comfort Literature.'

By 'Comfort Literature' what do you mean actually?

Frustrated souls are comforted by morally strong positive thinking. It helps to make life creative and full of contentment and hope amidst encircling gloom, tensions and tribulations. This is the literature with a good purpose. Man is equipped with vigour and vitality to believe in good values, transfer the good values to future generations and to sacrifice his life for those moral values.

What is your attitude towards art and literature?

Today we can see three types of art and literature—art for sensual pleasures, art for art's sake and art for enmity and annihilation. The so-called 'painkili' literature (erotic blue-film type descriptions not highly applauded today) belongs to the first type. New definitions and experiments in the artistic field belong to the second type. Ideals and appeals for social revolutions, bloodshed and class-wars can be assessed as the third type. All these streams of thought co-ordinate only the intellect and manual labour avoiding the areas of worship and devotion. In my opinion art and literature must be useful for the comfort of human souls.

Some Personal enquiries too. The origin of the name 'Vaidyan'?

The Vaidyan family is in Thevalakara, Kollam district. Here follows the history of the origin. In seventeenth century a man from the Brahmin family in Thevalakara by name 'Thazhamangalathu' received the Christian Faith. He is considered to be the founder of the Vaidyan Family. Through a monk from the royal family of Virad who settled down in Thevalakara in the first half of the eighteenth century, the members of this family became talented in medical treatment especially in the field of ophthalmology. One of our fore-fathers could cure the eyedisease of the mother of King Anizham Thirunal of Travancore. This

incident prompted the king to bestow upon the male members of the family the title 'Vaidyan.' Now the Vaidyan family members have settled down also in many other parts of the country.

Something about your education and family background?

The late K. O. Lukose Vaidyan, Karipottu Kizhakkedathu, Thevalakara of the Vaidyan family is my father. Mother's name Aleyamma. I had my primary education at Kizhakke Thevalakara L.P.S and secondary education at Bethel U.P.S. From Koor High School, Thevalakara I passed S.S.L.C examination with first class in 1967 and took B.Sc degree with Mathematics main from Devaswam Board College, Sasthamcotta in 1972. The next year I joined the Orthodox Theological Seminary and was ordained Deacon in 1976.

I took my B D from Serampore University with high grade. Together with my class-mate at the seminary Fr. M. A. Mathai (now Dr. Mathews Mar Severios Metropolitan) I went to the Soviet Union for higher studies. I was a student at the Lenin-grad Theological Academy (now St. Petersburg) for two years. Mastering the Russian language, I submitted my thesis about iconography in the same language. I took Master of Theology and returned to India. After obtaining another Master degree in Theology from Serampore University, I was appointed as Lecturer at the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam. On 21st November 1981 I was ordained priest by His Grace Mathews Mar Coorilose Metropolitan (now His Holiness the Catholicos Bese-lius Mar Thoma Mathews II).

My wife Mercy, who teaches at the M. S. S High School, Thazhakara, is the daughter of M. K. Koshy, and Rahelamma Teacher, Kulangara Mercy Cottage, Puthoor. Children: Luby Aley Mathew, Leena Raechel Mathew and Luke Mathew Vaidyan (Lishoi). Brothers and Sisters: K. L. Thomas Vaidyan (South Africa), Usha Thomas (Pune) K. L. Philip Vaidyan (Pune) and Shirley Dias (Kottayam). Adv. Mathews Koshy Kulangara and Thomas Koshy are my brothers-in-law.

You have lived and studied in Russia for two years. What is your attitude towards the changes in Russia?

Social justice is to be achieved through the path of non-violence. That which lasts long is the right co-ordination of intellect, manual labour and devotion. Both atheism and inhumanity are to be condemned. But still I hold the view that freedom controlled is better than freedom mis-used.

What do you think about the future of the Church?

Self-examination and self-criticism are necessary. Waves of holiness should be imparted. A return to the altar is the need of the time. Spiritual observances are to be practised. The Church should lead a crusade against immorality. Establishments and institutionalization must not result in losing human souls. The Church has to work out more charitable projects. Sheep-stealing is to be prevented by regular work-shops to publish and distribute apologetic writings. The church should encourage art and literature. Our religious lives must become experiential rather than emotional and intellectual. Theology should be shifted from textual character to cultic character. I am sure, in this way Malankara Church can achieve a renewed vital life more fruitful to the individuals and to the society at large.

## 1. What is an Icon?

The Greek word 'eikon' means image or portrait in the sense of a picture or a statue. The second translation of the word in the dictionary is 'a reflection in a mirror'. It also means phantom, vision, appearance. Thirdly, it means 'a mental picture'. The verb eikw thus means 'to be similar to, 'to the like', or 'to resemble line by line'. (Par les traits or portrait). The etymology of the word also indicates the meaning to be likely, to be credible, to be true to something or someone.

The word icon in the Christian theological context is derived from the Genesis story of the creation of man: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' Genesis proclaims 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.' (See Gen. 1:26, 27.)

An icon is a sacred representation 'upon sacred vessels and garments, on walls and panels painted with colours, made in mosaics, or out of any other material.'<sup>1</sup> Icons have now become wide-spread especially in the Orthodox world. They are designed to lead us from the physical to the spiritual realm. They convey the truths and values of Christianity. But some other Christians deny the need for such symbolic representations. They fear that it will lead to idolatry. Is it idolatry? No. It is quite different from idol worship. Icons deepen our understanding of divine things. They are used to edify the faithful.

---

1. Definition given by the Second Nicene Council of A.D. 787.

From the very beginning of Christianity, symbolic art existed among Christians. In the New Testament we come across many symbols. They point to the reality of the mystery of God's presence in the world and in the Church. The symbol of Dove was very prominent among early Christians. The symbol of Fish and Shepherd denoted Christ. The Greek word for fish (ikthus) which was an acrostic for 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior' was very prominent. The early Christians used representation of events in Holy Scripture to decorate their tombs. Such pictorial representations have been found in catacombs at Alexandria and Rome. Christian art co-ordinated its symbols in significant schemes of thought. Anthropomorphic personifications and apocalyptic themes were involved in the pictorial representation of the Church. Walter Lowrie makes the following comment: 'Early Christian literature was more symbolical and allegorical than we might wish it to be, and the symbolical interpretation of the Old Testament was richly exploited in the New especially by St Paul. In view of these facts it would be strange indeed if early Christian art had soberly eschewed the use of symbols'<sup>2</sup>. The early Christians had the idea that, through symbolic art one is made conscious of the presence of God.

The number and variety of symbolic representations increased in the succeeding centuries. The inner living faith of the believer was expressed through material media. Early Christian writers affirm the existence of sacred icons in their time and stress the value which icons have for the Christian. St. Basil said, 'Arise now before me you iconographers of the merits of the saints ... Let me be overwhelmed by your icons depicting

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2. *Walter Lowrie—Art in the Early Church. Page 8.*



the brave acts of the martyr!<sup>3</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa tells that he was very much moved by an icon of the sacrifice of Isaac. We are told that St. John Chrysostom had an icon of the Apostle Paul before himself as he studied St. Paul's epistles. The Byzantine style evolved primarily in the capital of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople. Until the outbreak of iconoclasm in 726 A. D., iconographic representations increased with each century.

The iconoclastic ban on icons resulted in a large-scale destruction of icons in the Byzantine Empire. During the controversy (c. 700 A. D.) protest arose widely against Christian paintings and icons. The Elvira synod of 706 A. D. took decisions against such symbolic representations. Emperor Leo the Isaurian openly sided with the iconoclasts and in 730 A. D. published a decree against icons. As a result, the Eastern Church was forced to create theological interpretations to icons. Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople defended the veneration of icons very strongly. With the political and military decline of the Byzantine Empire, Orthodox art did not decline. Iconography began to develop with great vigour and system.

It is merely an aesthetic taste? The answer is negative. We would discuss a picture by Picasso from the aesthetic point of view. But the case of an icon is quite different. The believer finds a spiritual reality in icons. The secular painter fails to express spiritual beauty, the beauty of humility, meekness, self-mastery, purity, peace, love and other Christian virtues. For painting an icon, rigid discipline of fasting and prayer is required. 'The beauty of the church must bear the impress of holiness, and the pleasure evoked by it must transcend that of

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3. *St. Basil—Homily on the martyrdom of Barlaam.* Quoted in 'The Orthodox Ethos.' P. 175.

mere aesthetic experience; it must be spiritual.'<sup>4</sup> In his book 'The joy of freedom'. Bishop Paulos Gregorios writes that icons are theophanies, manifestations of the sacred and the transcendent in space and time.' He continues, 'the icon, like the word is a revelation. It is a presence, not a decoration or an illustration.'<sup>5</sup> We can see that icons are different from portraits, photographs and statues. 'The icon is a kind of hieroglyph, a stylized symbol, a sign' an abstract scheme... It is loaded with the grace of an objective presence; it is a meeting place between the believer and the Heavenly World.'<sup>6</sup> The non-believer sees in an icon a great work of art and nothing more. whereas the believer finds it revelatory of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Will it lead to idolatry? This is a probable question. If the reverence paid to icons is simply absorbed by themselves, it would be idolatrous. Again if they become sacred on their own account, they are objects of superstition. But icons have a priestly character. They mediate between the world and the Kingdom of God. Take the case of an icon of St. Mary. The eyes, nose, vesture, the colours have all been pointed not to represent a person standing upon the earth, but a person standing in the Kingdom. Thus icons lead us to know the realities of the Kingdom of Heaven. Comparing icons and other forms of religious art, Joseph P. Frary writes, 'Icons do not represent historical events, as does most religious art in the West. They do not represent a state of being as do Buddhist statues of Bodhisatvas being enlightened. They are not personifications

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4. *Constantine Cavarnos—Iconographic decoration in the Orthodox Church, Article in Orthodox ethos.*

5. *T. Paul Verghese—The Joy of Freedom. Page 51*

6. 'Orthodox Spirituality' by a monk. Page 35. S. P. C. K. London 1946

of certain realities as some classical and post-Renaissance art is.....The claim is made for icons that the experience of an icon is experience of the Kingdom of Heaven, there is direct involvement with what is portrayed.'<sup>7</sup> Such honourable veneration (proskynesis) is distinguished from the act of worship (latreia), Hence the fear that icons will lead to idolatry is irrelevant.

During the iconoclastic controversy, John of Damascus strongly defended the icons. His arguments can be summarized as follows: The icon stands for something other than itself. An icon is a representation of a real sacred person or event, and is designed to lead us to it. An idol lacks this authentic symbolic character. The icons are based on the same principle as the theophanies of the Old Testament and the Incarnation of our Lord. All spiritual revelations have to use material media. We honour the icons just as we honour the Gospel, the cross etc. Things made by our own hands can be holy if they are set apart for the use of God. Through matter, they can lead us to the invisible God. We do not venerate the icons as God but only as filled with the energy and grace of God. The veneration of icons belongs to the tradition and many miracles are wrought through them. Hence to depart from them is a sin. John of Damascus also quotes St. Basil the Great who said: 'The honour which is given to the icon passes over to the prototype.' The prototype honoured is, in the last analysis God, as God created man in His own image.

The doctrinal basis is found in the fact of the Incarnation. Icons are testimonials to the Incarnation and reminders of it.

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7. *The logic of Icons. Sobornest. Winter 1972, Page 398.*

The appearance of icons 'is inextricably connected with the unveiling in the church's consciousness of the meaning of Incarnation; the fullness of the Godhead that dwells corporally in Christ.'<sup>8</sup> God cannot be represented in His eternal being. But God became man and took a body of material flesh. Because of this a picture may lawfully be made of him. Further, 'in assuming a human body He used matter as the vehicle of Spirit, rescued it from corruption and consecrated it to a share in His redemptive purpose.'<sup>9</sup> God is the author and artist of the universe. Icons in general, tell us of Beauty as a most mysterious and moving revelation of God. To Vladimir Soloviev, the Russian philosopher and theologian, Beauty is the transfiguration of matter through the incarnation of another in it, a supernatural principle. Thus in the reality of Icons beauty has its own value. Also the icons reveal something about the process of transfiguration. To put in the words of Nicolas Zernov, 'Icons manifest the reality of that process of transfiguration of the cosmos which began on the day of Pentacost and which is gradually extending to all sides of earthly life'.<sup>10</sup> John Bolger, a Roman Catholic writer has said, 'If the economy of Christianity is really one of Incarnation, then one has no right to reject icons.' In brief, the fact of Incarnation constitutes the real doctrinal basis of icons.

Zernov views that veneration of icons as another example of the sacramental principle accepted by all Christians. He argues, 'If water in baptism is essential to the cleansing from sin, if bread and wine at the Eucharist serve men's communion with God,

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8. *Alexander Schmemmann—The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy. Page 202.*

9. *R.M.French—The Eastern Orthodox Church. Page 135.*

10. *N. Zernov—The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century.*

11. '*Icons and the Sacramental System.*' '*One in Christ*' 1968. No. 1, Page 77.

then icons, too, provide a special facility for fellowship between the saints and members of the Church here on earth.<sup>12</sup> He considers icons as 'part of the transfigured cosmos.' The church itself is an icon of the universe. The Holy Eucharist is the means through which God's redemptive and transfigurative activity continues through time. In one sense the Eucharist is a divine image because it has the power to confer an inner sanctity on the partaker. In other words, the Eucharist 'imitates and repeats' the christian scheme of salvation. We have seen that an icon is constituted by the Kingdom of Heaven and the world. A close similarity between the function of an icon and that of the Eucharist is pictured by Joseph P. Frary in the following words: 'The revelation can manifest the reality of the Incarnation because the hypostatic union is a parallel reality: the person of Jesus Christ is constituted by the two natures, Similarly icons are sacramental because the great sacrament of the Eucharist is constituted by Bread, Wine and the Person who is Jesus Christ.'<sup>13</sup> Philip Sherrard gives the following interpretation: 'The framework of belief and worship to which the icon belongs is the Christian liturgy. The art of the icon is a liturgical art. It is a visual system conveying and giving support to the spiritual facts, which underlies the whole liturgical drama.'<sup>14</sup> In this sacramental function we are made aware of the object which an icon reveals. It leads to the transformation of the believer.

We have seen that the icons elevate the believers from the physical to the spiritual realm. By perceptible icons we are led

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12. *N. Zernov—The Christian East. Page 83.*

13: *Sobornost. Winter. 1972. Page 400*

14. 'The art of the icon' in 'Sacrament and Image' Ed. A. M. Allchin. Page 58.

to the contemplation of the divine and immaterial. They instruct, edify and transform the faithful. They act as catalytic agents for our sanctification. We can rightly consider the icons as 'a kind of window between the earthly and the celestial worlds'<sup>15</sup> The effect of icons in the spiritual nurture is tremendous. As remarked by Bulgakov, 'By the blessing of the icon of Christ, a mystical meeting of the faithful and Christ is made possible.'<sup>16</sup> The present writer is of opinion that the Orthodox Church in India must take necessary steps to encourage iconography. For that, a group of devoted artists with prayer, fasting, purity and humility must come forward in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In ancient days, monasteries were great workshops in which icons were produced:

## **2. The Historical Growth of Iconography**

### **The early Church and art**

Apostle Paul pictures Jesus Christ as the likeness of God (2 Cor. 4:4) and the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). The history of the Church proves that Christianity was proclaimed not only by words but also by symbolic representations. From the very beginning of Christianity there existed pictorial representations. Christian art was formulated and developed. The Church encouraged art and symbolism as a part of Christian

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15. *Ernst Benz—The Eastern Orthodox Church, Page 6.*

16. *S. Bulgakov—The Orthodox Church. Page 162*

mission. Jesus himself took matter as an arena of salvific mission. The seen and the unseen reality took the form of mediums and symbols. The Spiritual meanings of such symbolism nurtured through the ages.

What were the themes pictured in early Christian artistic works? Besides the objects and varieties of biological species related to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, geometrical impressions such as cubes, rectangles and circular notations were used in such symbolism. Gradually ancient forms were replaced by new ones being the products of a new world outlook. The new style incorporated images of Christian Spiritual ideals. Greek Hellenic art and Alexandrian traditional art coincided to form classical artistic metaphors. Elements from Egyptian, Syrian and Central Asian artistic traditions were also crept into such symbolic representations. Images and forms were used to denote both the divine and the material worlds. Such early Christian artistic tradition was developed with much vigour and variety in the Byzantine empire. The precious piety of the icon and the much celebrated iconography evolved as the result of dogmatic understanding and explanation of man's existence in relation to God's will, power and wisdom.

Walls of Christian homes in the early period were decorated with pictures of symbolic animals, birds, flowers and plants. The symbols of fish, ship, sheep, shepherd, dove, ocean, vine, bread etc. were widely used in the early Christian system of Communication. These symbols reflected biblical understanding of salvation, God's mercy, power, miracles and commandments. The message of the apostles were clearly transmitted through these signs and symbols. The catacombs and later, the Christian Churches were adorned with such images. The fact of Incarnation and the works of salvation

were explained through these symbols. A sailor denoted a Christian, the ship Christian life. The ship also conveyed the heavenly blessings bestowed upon a human being. In ancient Indo-European mythology, a shepherd with a carrier full of milk denoted prosperity. In Christian tradition, the good shepherd is Jesus Christ, the Savior who gives hope, love and new life. Prophet Ezekiel spoke about this good shepherd 'Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep; no longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths that they may not be food for them (Ezek. 34:10). 'For thus says the Lord God; Behold, I, I myself will search for the sheep and will seek them out'. (Ezek. 34:11) 'And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have fouled with your feet?' (Ezek. 34:19). The Psalm of David reads: 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he makes me lie down in green pastures'. Ps. 23: 1, 2. Jesus himself reveals that he is the good shepherd. (Jn. 10:14).

The Old Testament symbol of lamb was widely used by early Christians Num. 28:3 f. Ex. 29:39 The blood of the lintel explained in the book of Exodus in an important sign in the life of the people of Israel. Ex. 12:23. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God as described in the New Testament. Jn. 1:29, Rev. 5:6, 13, 14:1, 21:22. All the attributes of the Lamb is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. The unblemished lamb which drinks water on the mountain-spring denotes Jesus Christ. The mountain is the Church. The symbol of fish was of great importance to the early Christians. Jesus said to the fishermen: 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,' Mt. 4:19, Mk. 1:17. The net, the boat, the sea, the fishermen, the heap of fish all these symbols were used by



the early Christians to denote redemption of souls. The four gospels and the New Testament writers exhaustively used these symbols. The Church has placed Christ and His ministry at the core of its life. The Greek word for fish *ichthus*, when expanded, stands for Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.' This is the sum-total of Christian faith. It is to be noted that the early Christians even kept with them small prototypes of fish-metallic or made of stone or even with precious pebbles. They used to wear ornaments in which the form of fish was inscribed. Also the tradition of using crosses, metallic or wooden, developed in the Church. In ancient Christian centres, catacombs full of such inscriptions are excavated. Pictures of fish and the inscriptions of the word *ichthus* are found out from these Christian centres on a large scale. The new birth through baptism in water and spirit is re-called through the symbol of fish. The writings of Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, Irenaeus; Origen and other scholars of the early Church prove that the symbol of fish was so dear to the early Church. Tertullian in his 'Teaching about Baptism' said 'we like fish swim in Jesus Christ, live in Him, who is the water of life.'

The symbols of vine and vineyard have both ecclesiastical and sacramental significance. Jesus said: 'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing, (John: 15:4, 5). The central importance and mutual connection of Christ, Church and sacramental life are vividly pictured in this passage. In his 'Pedagogue' Clement of Alexandria said 'Vineyard gives wine just as the word gave His own blood'. This passage has Old Testament roots. Moses brought branch of vine from the land of Canaan. It shows the land of promise.

In the New Testament we see that the person who partakes in the Body and Blood of Christ inherits eternal life, the new land of Canaan.

All these symbolic representations are seen in the Catacombs even today. A large variety of these arts are seen in stones and frescoes, together with texts of prayer, robes, wooden and metal cross and so on. In Pre-Constantine period, when Christianity remained religio-*illicita*, without protection from the rulers, the believers turned these catacombs into places of worship and Christian fellowship. A. Von Frikken who specially made research on Roman Catacombs says that almost all the biblical narratives of parables, and miracles of Jesus were pictured on the walls of Roman Catacombs. He says that the portraits of Jesus, the Mother of God, Apostles, Martyrs and saints were seen in these catacombs.

Pictures and Images at least from the second century are preserved in these catacombs even today. Mother of God holding Infant Jesus and prophets are also pictured. Such artistic works from the beginning of second century covering almost all parts of both Old and New Testaments reveal the mode of worship and practices prevailed in the early Church. Von Frikken mentions also the following Biblical incidents pictured in the Roman Catacombs: The miracles of Jesus, events from the life of St. Mary, the Last Supper, the resurrection of Lazar, Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, Ascension of the Lord, Resurrection and Second Coming of the Lord, The advent of the Holy Spirit etc. Archeological findings from the Catacombs include the life and teachings of Old Testament prophets, the calling of Abraham, the sacrifice of Isaac, (The Catacomb of Marellin) Moses and his life, the stream of water from Rock (Catacomb of Kallistas) Prophet Elijah (Catacomb of Priscilla) Prophet Jonah

(Catacomb of Kallistas) Prophet Daniel (The Catacomb of Kripta Lutsi) and so on. Artistic works of Greek and European Culture were seen on a large scale whereas that of Jewish, Syrian and Asia Minor were less in number. Writings and artistic works on the tombs had dogmatic, aesthetic and apologetic connotations which explained faith in the resurrection of the dead and life after life.

The meaning of the symbolic representations in the early Church was unknown to the non-believers whereas it was crystal clear to the community of believers. To put the message of the early christian artistic symbols in a nutshell, it is 'live in God.'

### **Christian art in the Post-Constantinian Era**

When Christianity obtained the status of national religion (religio licita) Christian art began to flourish rapidly. The ancient form of the art gave way to the Byzantine form. Huge places of worship were built and adorned with gold and other precious stones. The 'Sophia Cathedral' of Constantinople became world famous for its artistic excellence. On the walls of this Cathedral were pictured events from the Bible in a most fascinating manner. The life of Christ, St. Mary, saints and martyrs are vividly portrayed in colours. Beautiful Churches and monasteries were built and they were decorated attractively with the early forms of icons and symbols using mosaics and frescoes.

John of Damascus reminds that an image made during the lifetime of Jesus has been preserved until the 'present day'. That is referred here is an apocryphal account in Syriac of negotiations between Jesus Christ and Abgar V. King of Edessa. The story says that Christ cured the king and that Hannan, an artist in

the service of the king, painted a portrait of Christ. Another version of this story is that the first icon of Christ is the portrait written by the hands of our savior Himself preserved and sent to Abgaar king of Edessa. (Leonard Uspensky -The first icon of Christ and St. Mary). The story continues that Thaddaeus, one among the 70 disciples brought it to Abgaar. Many miracles are performed by this icon. King Abgaar himself was healed.

Eusebius the Church historian describes this event in his historical account of the early Church. Historian Evagrius in his 'History of the Church' (6th century) also gives a description about the first icon of Christ. Moses hornes the author of 'History of Armenia', Pope Gregory II, John of Damascus and others join with Eusebius to convey the miracles and the history related to the first icon of Christ. Historian Sosomen of Calamina (5th century) tells about the icon of Christ kept in Caesarea Philippi. Icons of the Mother of God, St. Peter, St. Paul and other apostles, saints and martyrs were kept inside Christian Churches. In her letter to Eusebius of Caesarea, Constantia, sister of emperor Constantine writes that a large number of portraits of Jesus Christ are preserved in that period. But when Constantia visited Jerusalem and requested an image of Christ from Eusebius of Caesarea, she received the answer that 'the form of a servant' assumed by the Logos in Jesus Christ was no longer in the realm of reality and that her concern for a material image of Jesus was unworthy of true religion, after His glorification, Christ could be contemplated only 'in the mind'. (Text of Eusebius' letter in Nicephorus contra Eusebius, ed. J. B. Pitra, spicilegium solesmense. Paris 1852 repr. Graz. 1962. I, P 383-386) Eusebius wrote to Constantia: I do not know what has impelled you to command that an image of our savior be drawn. Which image of Christ do you want? Is it a true and unchangeable one, portraying his countenance

truly, or the one which he assumed on our behalf when he took on the appearance of the form of a slave? This passage was frequently quoted by the iconoclasts. Arguments for and against icons began to fill the theological atmosphere of the early Church with much sound and fury leading to the open clash—the iconoclastic controversy.

### **3. The Theological Justification for Icons**

Images in the church belongs to the unwritten tradition which is equally powerful. In his treatise 'On the Holy Spirit' St. Basil of caesarea attributed various practices for example, the sign of the cross, three—times immersion at baptism, facing east at prayer etc. to the authority of a tradition that was unwritten in form but apostolic in origin. The term Trinity is not in the Bible. Just as Christ did not command images in the scripture, he had not commanded prayer to the east or signing the cross. Christ did not even banned images or symbolism. Leontius of Neapolis, one of the earliest defenders of images argued that even Solomon, in adorning the temple had made many graven and moulded objects which God had not commanded and yet had not been condemned for this because he made these forms to the glory of God. (P G. 94:1273). The same is applicable in the case of images or icons. The Word of God in patristic literature equally design—ates both the written tradition and symbols of faith. The icons, as the Bible are the expressions of the revelation of God which was accomplished in the Incarnation. The liturgy of the church also contained elements that had been transmitted orally or by practice.

To put it in the words of John of Damascus, 'just as throughout the universe the gospel has been proclaimed without being written, so throughout the universe there has been handed down without being written, the tradition that images are to be made of Christ the incarnate God and of the saints, as well as the tradition that one should worship the cross and pray in a standing position facing the East.' (Images, 2. 16. PG 94:-1304) Explaining the prohibition of images in Ex 20:4, Clement of Alexandria says that this prohibition meant that graven images of anything were a deception, for the image is only dead matter shaped by the hand of the artisan. But Christians, says Clement, have no tangible image made of tangible material' but an image that is perceived by the mind alone, the God who alone is truly God. Clement even provides a list of subjects that could properly be portrayed on seals. [Paedagogue 3:1. GCS. 1:270, Exhortation to the Greeks, 4. 51. 6. (GCS. 12:40) GCS stands for Die griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte. Bertin 1897-] Also it is attributed to Clement: he said in a lost treatise, On the Passover that the image of an absent person was to be accord the honour that was due person himself. (On the Passover. fragment 33. GCS 17:218) John of Damascus frequently quotes St. Basil's interpretation of the image. Basil had said: The honour that is paid to the image passess over to the prototype (Basil. 'On the Holy Spirit', 18.45 PG. 32:1249)

Practice of devotion to the relics of the saints and martyrs appears in the writings of St. Gregory of Nyssa. In his treatise On Theodore the Martyr, Nyssa says, 'those who behold them (relics) embrace, as it were, the living body itself in its full flower. They bring eye, mouth, ear, all their senses into play. And then shedding tears of reverence and passion, they address to the martyr their prayer of intercession as though he were alive

and present.' (PG.46:740) In his treatise, 'On the Deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' Gregory of Nyssa described his feelings at viewing an image portraying Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac. Paulinus of Nola, an younger contemporary of Gregory of Nyssa gives evidence that images of Christian saints were already being set up in Christian Churches. (Paulinus of Nola—Epistles. 30:2. CSEL. 29:262-263 CSEL means- Corpus Christianorum series latina. Turnhout, Belgium, 1935—) He did consent to the installation of an image of Martin of Tours in a baptistery because 'he bore the image of the heavenly man by his perfect imitation of Christ, and therefore this portrait of a heavenly soul worthy of imitation was an appropriate subject for men to look at when, in baptism, they were laying aside their own earthly image (Paulinus of Nola. Epistles. 32:2 CSEL 29:276). The devotees of Simeon Stylite were said to be putting up images of him at the entrance of their workshops for protection. (Theodoret of Cyr—hus. History of Religion. 26:11. ed: Lietzmann. 8.) The Second Council of Nicea decreed that the venerable and holy icons be erected, just as the form of the revered and life-giving cross is... in the holy churches of God ...namely, the icon of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, as well as that of the Holy Mother God, and those of the revered angels and of all the saints and holy men.' (Act. 7. Mansi 13:378)

Jaroslav Pelikan in his book 'The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine' (Vol. 2, The University of Chicago Press 1977) gives a list of definitions given to icon by the early scholars who defended it. A few of them follows: The icon is a likeness of that of which it is the image, in itself showing by imitation the character of its archetype.... the true in the likeness, the archetype in the image.' (Theodore the Studite). The icon is a kind of seal and representation bearing within itself the authentic form of that from which it also gets its

name.' (Theodore the Studite). The icon is a triumph, a manifestation, and a monument in commemoration of a victory. (John of Damascus. relating the victory of Christ and his followers over the demons.)

The icon is a likeness, an illustration, and a representation of something, showing forth in itself that which is imaged. (John of Damascus)

The icon is a likeness of an archetype, having impressed upon it the form of what it represents by similarity, differing from it only by the difference of essence in accordance with the materials (of which they are made); or an imitation and similitude of the archetype, differing (from it) in essence and substance; or a product of some technical skill, shaped in accordance with the imitation of the archetype, but differing from it in essence and substance, (Patriarch Nicephorus). An image bears an immutable and, in a sense, a perfect likeness to its archetype, nevertheless it is different from it in essence. (Maximus the Confessor.)

In the beginning of seventh century, Leontius of Neapolis asked whether one would not, for example, kiss the clothing of his departed wife in her memory, and maintained that Christian icons were no more than especially vivid examples of such memorials. (Leontius. Sermons 3. PG. 93:1600) Veneration of icons involve such a devotional meaning and a Psychological significance for the believer, Patriarch photius of Constantinople when discussed the relevance of an icon said, 'sight, having touched and encompassed the object through the effusion of optical rays, transmits to the mind the essence of what has been seen'. (quoted by J. Pelikan op.cit P. 121). Sight and hearing are inter-related, Prophet Isaiah in his vision saw the Lord upon his throne in the temple. In many ways, sight and touch



prove to be more effective than hearing. Seeing a cross or an icon elevates the believer to the experience of the saving action of God.

To worship the things that are invisible the human being who is visible needs aid of visible means. Spiritual or mental knowledge remains chaotic. Worship in Spirit and truth never deny the use of material means. There was a baptism in water as well as in the Spirit and therefore man also needed to see the divine represented in images. John of Damascus humbly puts it, since I am a human being and bear a body, I want to deal with holy things and behold them in a bodily manner'. (Images I. P. G. 94:12, 64). Just as we use books (made of matter) to educate the illiterate, icons also help to instruct and edify the illiterate believers.

The argument that iconography leads to idolatry was refuted by the following clarifications: An idol was the representation of persons or things that were devoid of reality or substance, while an icon represented real persons. This distinction is to be considered that the images of heathen worship were devoted to the service of the devil' but the icons of Christian worship were dedicated to the glory of the true God. The tree of the cross had replaced the wood of pagan worship, and the eucharistic sacrifice had come in place of heathen rituals; so also the holy memorials of the Savior had overthrown the various unclean monuments of the Gentiles. Thus the representation of Christ in an icon was a way of dispelling idolatry. Actually a believer honours the icon of a martyr who destroyed idols. The presence of an icon is a via media between the false spiritualism of the iconoclasts and the false materialism of the idolaters. There are people who ask where is it written in scripture that the icon of Christ is to be worshipped? The iconophiles answer this question

by posing another question: Where it is written that Christ is to be worshipped? According to the Scripture, God himself had been the first to have images of himself. First was the eternal Son of God as 'the image of the invisible God'; secondly Adam was made in the image of God. It is true that we see prohibition of graven images in the Decalogue. The same account of Moses includes the building of the tabernacle, complete with images of cherubim. Also in the temple there were the blood and ashes of sacrificed animals. These had now been replaced by the images of saints. In Gen.19:1, we see the account of Abraham on the plain of Mamre who worshipped an angel. The veneration of the Book of the Law and that of the icons are compared by the scholars like Leontius of Neapolis. In his sermons we read: 'As you (the Jesus), in worshipping the Book of the Law, are not worshipping the nature of the parchment or of the ink, but the words of God in them; so, when I worship the image of God, am not worshipping the nature of the wood and the colours, but holding the lifeless portrait of Christ, I hope through it to hold and worship Christ himself.' (Sermons 3 P G 93:1600) We respect and worship the holy altar, the Gospels, the Cross and the like. Icons are worshiped on the same ground, because they are the manifestations of the Kingdom of God.

There is a special power in the symbol of the Cross of Christ. Icon is nothing but the symbol of the Crucified Christ. Such power is manifested through the miraculous deeds ascribed to the icons. By the relics and icons of the saints demons had been exorcised and miracles had been performed. The message of the Eucharist itself justify the significance of icons. The adoration to the Creator is given only to God who is by nature adorable. But there is also a worship paid to the 'friends and worshippers of God' for his sake, because of their derivative divine nature; including both saints and angels, When the

veneration is given to the icons, that is actually given to Christ the incarnate one who made himself manifest through the material, mediums. When the gospel said that an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, this meant that he must have assumed a visible form, hence one that could be represented in an image. John of Damascus even argued that iconoclasm is a species of docetism, a dis-respect for the mystery of God-manhood. The reality of the incarnation of the Logos justify icons. In the Kenotic passage of the Bible (Phil. 2:5-11) Christ had two forms, the form of God and the form of a slave. In the latter form, God could be represented in an image. In his 'Epistle to Plato on the cult of the Holy Images', Theodore the studite refers to the Trinitarian mystery as explained by the phrase 'One ousia and three hypostases'. The Father and the Son, says Theodore, were one in nature but two in hypostasis while Christ and the image of Christ were one in hypostasis but two in nature; from this it followed that there was only one mode of worship, whether addressed to the entire Trinity because of the unity of nature or to the icon of Christ because of the unity of hypostasis. (PG. 99:502)

The first letter of St. John chapter 1, verse 1 follows: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon touched with our hands...the life was made manifest....? Thus we can identify specific scenes from the life of Christ. We see Christ seated at the well, walking on the water, visiting Capernaum etc. In the gospels, Christ is written in words. Thus it was also possible to write in gold, by depicting these scenes in icons. Similarly, Christ's descent from heaven for the incarnation, his birth from the Virgin, his baptism in the Jordan, his transfiguration on Mount Tabor, his sufferings, his miracles his burial, resurrection, ascension etc. can be described both

in speech and in colours, both in books and in pictures. We give reverence to the paper and carbon by which the gospels are printed. Shall we not give reverence to the frames and colours through which the salvific acts of Christ are described?

The Fathers of the Church who defended icons made a distinction between 'theology' and 'economy'. In 'theologia', as distinct from 'oikonomia', there could not be any discussion or consideration of a similitude or picture, and it was to this that the Mosaic prohibition applied. But in 'oikonomia', this similitude is proper and hence icons have validity. Thus for the common believers, the icon is a cherished object of religious devotion and a valuable source of religious instruction. In another words, an icon is a guide book to the common mass, an atlas for the illiterate.

The icons have a high role in Orthodox piety and worship. The liturgical doctrine of the icon conveyed a theological knowledge about a divine reality that transcended all being. The icons are expressive of the silence of God, exhibiting in themselves 'the ineffability of a mystery that transcends being'. The interpretation of the Eucharist as a sacrifice justify the practice of veneration of icons. In worship we express the form of the orders of being that transcend this world. Among such forms of worship are also the icons. Theology in the textual character is here replaced by that in the cultic character. In the liturgy the mysteries of salvation through Christ are depicted. The same mysteries are also depicted in the icons. There is a spiritual union between liturgy and art. Theology is not God-talk in a rational level. It is experiencing god in worship and glorification. True doctrine of the Church is based on its doxology. The rituals in worship are a way of illumination for the mind. Participation in the divine mysteries is not only by words.

Both in the Liturgy of Basil and in the Liturgy of Chrysostom, we see praise of the life-giving cross. 'King and Lord, God of hosts, save thy people and grant them peace by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the symbol of the precious cross of thine only-begotten Son, who is blessed with thee for ever and ever'. On the day of Easter and on the Sunday of Mid-Lent the Orthodox believer prays: 'On this day, the all-holy cross is worshipped and the resurrection of Christ is proclaimed. Today the life-giving tree is worshipped, and the entire cosmos is re-awakened to praise'. The veneration of the icon is closely related to the veneration of the cross. In the history of the Orthodox Churches we see that icons helped for defence against invaders and hostile forces with miraculous divine intervention. Innumerable miracles are credited to the icons of Christ, St. Mary, saints and martyrs.

## **4. The Doctrinal Basis and Sacramental Function**

Why the existence of icon is justified? The simple answer of the believer is prayer and worship. prayer-both individual and corporeal- is the essence of the life of the faithful. The Orthodox believer speaks about icons putting them into their natural context, the prayer of the home, and the prayer of the liturgy in the Church. The practice of the veneration of icons is based on the Holy scripture, Tradition and the Liturgy. A believer's personal experience is that the icon is an image of special luminosity and not a naturalistic one.

The doctrinal basis of the icon is seen in Gen. 1:26, 27. God said 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..... So God created man in his own image.' These phrases 'image' and 'likeness' do not mean the same thing. Wisdom 2:23 says, 'God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity.' St. Paul writes to the Corinthians that the dignity of man comes from the fact that he is the image and glory of God. 'For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God.' (1 cor. 11:7) The idea of the 'image of God, does not refer to the human body alone, for God is incorporeal.

When Justin Martyr and St. Irenaeus of Lyons, in their fight against Gnosticism, called the body 'the image of God' it did not convey the idea that the whole man is made in the image of God-both body and soul. The passage in Gen.1:26 'let us make man in our image, ...' the image of God in man concerns his spiritual nature, his intelligence, his will, his every feeling in so far as it strives towards God. The message is 'to be with God.' Scholars point out that 'to be like God' pre-supposes a becoming like God. The growth of man from 'glory to glory' is portrayed here. It is a growth from immaturity to maturity. Here one attains moral perfection. God's grace and man's effort here coincide. In other word it is 'synergeia' or working together. The distinction between the image and likeness is explained by an Orthodox Theologian as follows: The image of God in man is the premise for his likeness with God. The image of God in man belongs to his very nature through creation. Man is man by virtue of this image. But likeness is not given like that. Man has to attain it. It constitutes man's free co-operation with the grace of God. Likeness is a becoming, something that is lived out. It is a total holiness. The expression in the image points to

the gift of reason and freedom and the expression 'according to the likeness' points to the assimilation of God through virtue

What is the nature of the people who are depicted on icons? To quote a contemporary Finnish Orthodox Church leader: They are very special, incredibly varied, but with one thing in common that they had attained, here on earth, that likeness with God for which we are intended through grace and through personal ascetic endeavour, in a life where they had put matters in their right order, as had indeed been intended for us all; where the Spirit was in control, if Spirit is understood as what it is, namely not something apart from man's physical and psychological life, but the life-giving and God-centred factor in it. We see on the icon men and women who had become imitators of Christ in the way they lived, and often in the way they died, too. It is a question of having risen above the natural state of Creation (Adam) and adopting that of Salvation (of Christ, the new Adam) making full use of the gift of Grace—as St. John says in the beginning of his gospel: 'and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. (Outi Piiorinen-Icon in the Orthodox Church. Paper presented at the Syndesmos General Assembly at Valamo Monastery, Finland, 1980).

The doctrinal basis of icons is clear from the Orthodox worship of the First Sunday in Lent in the Byzantine Tradition: 'Oh, Mother of God, the undescribable Word of the Father was made flesh through Thee and therefore became describable. And penetrating with his divine beauty the impure image of man, he restored it to its pristine state. As we confess the Salvation, we depict it in deed and word'. This prayer is said on the day when the re-institution of icons into Orthodox worship is commemorated. An icon is an image of the incorruptible, transfigured, deified body of a man or a woman, shown in an attitude of prayer or blessing, often with his or her life-story around it. What

it is we are looking for in an icon? We are looking not, at a natural body, but at a transfigured body. We are truly seeing some one, not something that may appeal to, or repulse our senses and stir our emotions. We see as through a window into the Kingdom of God, and here all speculation and debating cease, in this presence as we pray. The reason why the Old Testament Law forbade graven images was that before man had seen God incarnate, the Son of God and the Son of man, Jesus Christ the perfect man-before that no one could know what matter redeemed and total holiness looked like.

We have seen that the Incarnation is the justification for icons. It is the alpha and omega of icons. In the Incarnation, God took a body which was composed of the matter of creation, and therefore matter became sanctified or capable of sanctification. The icon was the logical outcome of this fact. The scripture calls Christ the Logos, the Word of God and also the Image of God. The Incarnation is the culmination of beauty. Actually beauty is holiness, and its radiance the participation of the creature in Divine Beauty. The beauty of an icon is the beauty of the acquired likeness to God—through prayer and ascetic practices. Icon's significance lies not in its being beautiful in itself or in its appearance as a beautiful object, but in the fact that it depicts Beauty transfigured.

The promise and vocation of man is to be partakers of the divine nature. St. Peter says that we are eye-witnesses of God's Majesty. 'For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory. 'This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased, 'we heard this voice



borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. St. John recorded the event of transfiguration differently. St. John begins his gospel by coming straight to the ultimate point and purpose of the Incarnation; before he gives us the narrative of Christ's life, he tells us who Christ was, what He had come ultimately to show His creature, and that the creature had not understood. St. John clarifies that the Transfiguration happened at the end of Christ's mission on earth. He introduces three words: glory, light and grace in his account. The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Also St. John writes: In Him was life; and the life was the light of men; and the light shineth in the darkness... St. John the Baptist came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe. The glory of the Transfigured Christ, the uncreated Light or the divine light is neither material nor spiritual. It transcends the created order. It is the ineffable splendour of the divine nature; one in three hypostases.

The three disciples Peter, John and James could see beyond the historical Jesus at the Transfiguration. St. Gregory Palamas says that these disciples saw one of the Holy Trinity, while the other two Persons of the holy Trinity manifested themselves, the Father through his voice witnessing to his beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit by the splendour with him in the Cloud of Light, indicating that the Son possess with the Father, the Light, which is one, like everything which belongs to their wealth. Saints can see this glory, the divine uncreated light. Among the disciples of Christ only three were chosen to witness this glory. Those who are called should have the faith and fidelity to the things which have already been revealed and experienced. The mystical theology of the Orthodox Church manifests a deep spirituality

with deep stirring words in the Liturgy and mysterious icons. All these Spiritual realities are to be approached with sobriety and humility in the matrix of holiness, worship and ethical purity and not as a platform on which to exercise our private quests for spiritual experiences.

In one of the prayers of the 'Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy' in the Byzantine Church, we read 'The indefinable word of the Father made himself definable, having taken flesh of thee, O Mother of God, and having refashioned the soiled image to its former estate, has suffered it with Divine Beauty.' This prayer shows that the icon is based on the Incarnation which is fulfilment of God's plan and design concerning man and the world. This prayer is addressed to the Mother of God and not to the Person of the Holy Trinity. The reason is that Christ, the God-Man has a representable Mother. Mariology is closely linked with the theology of icons. To quote an Orthodox Theologian 'Just as the negation of the human image of the Savior implies the negation of the Divine Motherhood, so the affirmation of the icon exacts first of all the manifestation of the role of the Mother of God, veneration of Her as the indispensable condition of the Incarnation, the cause of the fact that God became representable.' (L. Ouspensky, *Meaning of Icons*. Page. 33). From the moment when Christ was born of a representable Mother, he clearly has a representation which corresponds with the image of His Mother. The theological argument in support of the icon is that if Christ had no image made by art, that would mean that Christ was not born of a representable Mother. Since the Son of God became necessary to represent Him as a man. Thus it represents a liturgic, sacramental expression of the teaching about the Incarnation.

Let us take the example of the icon of the Transfiguration of Christ. The top section of the icon could be called Heaven,

the bottom one Earth. The prophets Moses and Elijah conversing with Christ had both in their life time had experience of the Light of the Holy Spirit. The rays of light which come out of Christ are signs of the sanctifying grace, the gift of God, which makes us live which sanctifies.

What we see in the icon is that through Christ, by means of His very Body, the Holy Spirit is given to us, to make us holy. Holy Scripture tells us that the Apostles Peter, James & John saw the glory of God in Christ on Mt. Thabor. But the Bible tells us that man cannot see God - and live. Our human condition is such that, as we are, we are not fit for Heaven. When God manifested Himself to His prophets He did this in such a way to spare them from the destructive force of a direct encounter. Remember that He not only refused to reveal to Moses His face but even His Name—for when you tell a person your name, you reveal something very essential and personal you reveal yourself to him. Is it not significant that Christ, of all his followers, had chosen only three to accompany him to Mt. Thabor to witness His divinity? Do you remember how overcome they were and how the gentle cloud—the protection of the Holy Spirit—covered them, protected them who were heavy with earth, heavy with sleep? The conversation between Christ and the two Prophets is about His impending Passion, the crucifixion, death, the Resurrection. This was to help the Apostles, later, when all the tragic events were happening, that they would understand and not despair.

It is through the life and mission of Christ on earth that God prepares us for a meeting with Him: not God on earth, but Man among men—and only finally revealed in His fulness, to whomsoever it is given to comprehend it. The apostles are always shown overcome by the splendour of this great miracle

sometimes as if they had literally fallen over backwards with astonishment.

The great nimbus surrounding Christ is called 'mandorla'. It is usually blue of varying shades, sometimes incorporates a star. It is a symbol reserved for Christ alone, signifying His divinity, His glory. This mandorla is not seen in any of the Christ representations dealing with His mission. We see it after the Resurrection in the Ascension, and in the Dormition of the Mother of God, when He comes and receives her soul to take back to Heaven with Him. In depictions of Christ Pantocrator-again outside time—where He is Judge, flanked on either side by St. John the Baptist and the Mother of God—He is also painted inside this symbol of glory—which is in fact another way of representing Heaven.

Let us look closely at this icon of Christ Pantocrator. its other surnames are: 'Christ in Glory', or 'Enthroned', or 'in the company of the Heavenly Host'. Here, Christ is seated on the throne of glory. His dress is shot through with a fine network of gold rays, gold being par excellence the colour—or non-colour—indicating divinity. We see here the Christ who has overcome the world, Who has shed His earthly garment and exchanged it for the heavenly one, the robe of glory. Divine power goes out from Him indicated by bundles of rays of gold. These rays point directly to the apocalyptic beasts in the four corners. They represent the 4 Evangelists who were thus inspired to write Christ's Gospel, to be proclaimed in the four corners of the earth. They are mere symbols here—like shadows being without body or weight, paled in the presence of the Lord Christ our God. Throne and rootstool supporting Christ, too are weightless and seem to be of an otherworldly transparency. The flame-colored areas are rectangles arranged to form a star

of eight points: a symbol of the eighth day-the future aeon. The colour of flaming red is like the dawn coming out of the deep blue of the night. It is the light of the day it announces, and is therefore representative of the earth. The blue circle, however, is clearly an indication and symbol of heaven, enclosing as it does the angelic host. The heavenly powers are depicted as near enough as can be done as the bodiless spirits they truly are. In the Epistle by the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews we read a verbal parallel to what the painter depicted here: Speaking about the Son of God he says: 'who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person (meaning the Father)... sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.' A little further on we read: 'And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son He saith, 'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever. A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy Kingdom.' A little further on we read: 'And thou, O Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands.' This is truly an icon of the meeting of Heaven and earth in Christ.

The sacramental function of the icon is clear from the fact that it provides a special facility for fellowship between the saints, living and the departed. Just as baptism becomes essential to the cleansing from sin and bread and wine are unavoidable at the Eucharist, icons become necessary for this communion. The Eucharist is a divine icon. Icons are sacramental because the great sacrament of the Eucharist is constituted by Bread, wine and the person who is Jesus Christ. Icon is the sacramental life of the Church lived in Christ.

## 5. The Iconoclastic Controversy

This controversy is intimately connected with the Christological issues of the early Church in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. The emperors of the eighth and ninth centuries paid much interest in the iconoclastic movement which shows that both theological and non-theological factors were crept into this crisis. Greek-speaking Christians, in general inherited and developed a taste for religious imagery. It is pointed out that when some people condemned such art as idolatrous, the tri-dimensional form disappeared and it took the shape of two-dimensional artistic forms. The non-Greek speaking Christians particularly the Syrians and the Armenians tried to offend the three-dimensional forms of art with theological arguments. Also we can see an Islamic influence on the iconoclastic movement. After the Arab conquest of Palestine, Syria and Egypt, the Byzantine Empire was forced to fight with Islam both militarily and ideologically. Islam claimed a higher revelation of the God of Abraham and accused Christianity of polytheism and idolatry. The Christian idea of the Holy Trinity and the Christian practice of symbolic art and iconography were misunderstood and attacked by Islam. The attempts to withstand the challenge of Islam resulted in the outbreak of iconoclastic controversy.

The proponents of iconoclasm took the Old Testament prohibitions against any representation of God just as literally as the Jews had.

The church in the Byzantine empire developed a relative doctrine of the image as a means of access to the divine prototype and not as a dwelling of the divine Himself. The belief in an

historical incarnation of God was inconsistent with total iconoclasm, they argued. An historical Christ is necessarily visible and depictable. They also pointed out that the catalytic agent of iconoclasm is platonic spiritualism which denied to matter, a permanent, God-created existence and believed that the only true reality was 'intellectual'. The advisers of the iconoclastic emperors Leo III (717–741) and Constantine V (741–775) were spokesmen of platonic spiritualism who opined that matter is evil and that Jesus Christ could be contemplated only 'in the mind' after His glorification. Emperor Constantine V himself published theological treatises attacking the veneration of icons and gathered in Hieria a council claiming ecumenicity in A.D. 754. In order to justify his position, emperor Constantine V formally referred to the authority of the first six councils. The Acts of the assembly of Hieria are preserved in the minutes of the Second Council of Nicea which formally rejected iconoclasm (A.D. 787). The assembly of Hieria affirmed that when the artist makes an image of Christ, he can paint either Christ's humanity alone, thus separating from the divinity or both His humanity and His divinity. In the first case he is a Nestorian; in the second case he assumes that divinity is circumscribed by humanity, which is absurd; or that both are confused, in which case he is a 'monophysite'. The iconoclasts and their allies were very much impressed by these arguments. They held the view that the deification of Christ's humanity suppressed its properly human individual character. They ignored the fact that in being assumed by the hypostasis of the Logos, human nature does not emerge with divinity; it retains its full identity. They considered the image identical with the prototype: The only image they would admit is the sacramental image of the Eucharist as the image and symbol of Christ.

The Council in Trullo (late seventh century) put forward a confession of faith in the historical Incarnation, which could not

be properly expressed in the symbolic figure of a lamb and which needed an image of Jesus 'in His human form'. Canon 82 of the Council in Trullo follows: 'In certain reproductions of venerable images, the precursor is pictured indicating the lamb with his finger. This representation was adopted as a symbol of grace. It was a hidden figure of that true lamb who is Christ our God, shown to us according to the Law. Having thus welcomed these ancient figures and shadows as symbols of the truth transmitted to the Church, we prefer today grace and truth, themselves as a fulfilment of this law. Therefore, in order to expose to the sight of all, at least with the help of painting, that which is perfect, we decree that henceforth Christ our God must be represented in His human form, and not in the form of the ancient lamb.' (Mansi, XIII, 252 AB, 256 AB) Later, the Germanus I, the Patriarch of Constantinople (715–730) used some Christological arguments against iconoclasm. To quote: 'In eternal memory of the life in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ of His passion, His saving death, and the redemption of the world which results from them, we have received the tradition of representing Him in His human form, that is, in His visible theophany understanding that in this way we exalt the humiliation of God the Word.' (Germanus I, *De haeresibus et synodis*; PG 98:80 A.) But Germanus was forced to resign under imperial pressure from Leo III who issued decrees against the images. Germanus can be considered as the first witness of Orthodoxy against iconoclasm in Byzantium.

The three treatises written by John of Damascus for the defence of the images, could unite Orthodox opinion in the Byzantine world. He was a monk of the Monastery of St. Sabbas in Palestine. John wrote that by His own will, God, became visible by assuming a material existence and giving to matter a



new function and dignity. God is both invisible and visible. Through the Incarnation, God has become visible for us by participation in flesh and blood. To quote from the orations of John of Damascus, 'In former times, God, without body or form, could in no way be represented. But today, since God has appeared in the flesh and lived among men, I can represent what is visible in God (to horaton tou theou). I do not venerate matter, but I venerate the creator of matter, who became matter for my sake, who assumed life in the flesh, and who, through matter, accomplished my salvation.' (Or. I, P.G. 94:1236c). John of Damascus denounced the iconoclasts' identification of the image with the prototype. An icon is not God. The Old Testament used images especially in temple worship. There are prefigurations of Christ. Only the Son and the Holy Spirit are 'natural images' of the father, and therefore consubstantial with Him. Other images are essentially different from their model, and therefore, they are not idols. The Second Council of Nicea declared that images or icons, since they are distinct from the divine model, can be the objects only of a relative veneration or honour, not of worship which is reserved for God alone.

Fr. John Meyendorff makes the following comment about the misunderstanding on the point of worship and veneration. This misunderstanding.....is partly the result of difficulties in translation. The Greek *proskynesis* (veneration) was already translated as *adoratio* in the Latin version of the Conciliar Acts used by Charlemagne in his famous *Libri Carolini* which rejected the council. And later, even Thomas Aquinas-who of course, accepted Nicea II admitted a relative adoration (*latreia*) of the images, a position which gave the Greeks the opportunity of accusing the latins of idolatry at the council of Hagia Sophia in 1450' (John Meyendorff-Byzantine Theology: historical trends and

doctrinal themes. New York, 1974. Fordham University Press page 46 )

After the Second Council of Nicea, Theodore the Studite (759–826) and Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople (806–815) developed the points of Christology against the iconoclasts. The ideas of Theodore the Studite about the veneration of icons are seen in his three *Antirrhetics* against the iconoclasts, in his letters to contemporaries and in his discourses. He affirmed the historical facts of the New Testament and the reality of Christ's manhood. The iconoclasts argued that Christ in virtue of the union between divinity and humanity, was indescribable, and therefore no image of Him was possible. Theodore in his *Antirrhetic* volume I writes 'Christ was certainly not a mere man; neither is it Orthodox to say that He assumed an individual among men but the whole, the totality of the nature. It must be said, however, that this total nature was contemplated in an individual manner for otherwise how could it have been seen? - in a way which made it visible and describable..., which allowed it to eat and drink....' (PG. 99:332 D-333 A. Quoted by Meyendorff op. cit. P. 47). Theodore also recalls the example of St. Thomas the Apostle placing his finger into Jesus' wounds. Jesus was a concrete human being otherwise this experience would have been impossible. He also quotes Isaiah 8:3 which describes him as a male being and argues that only the forms of the body can make man and woman distinct from one another.

The icon of Christ to Theodore the Studite is not only an image of 'the man Jesus', but also of the Incarnate Logos. The Logos assumed all the characteristics of a man, including describability, and His icon is a permanent witness of this fact. Christ's humanity is a new humanity in full communion with

The Trinitarian God. God is the 'greatest icon—Painter' who made man in His own image. Therefore iconography is a divine action with sacramental function. Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople (806–815) defended icons in his Refutation of the iconoclastic Council of 815, three *Antirrhetics*, one Long Apology and a treatise by name Against Eusebius and Epiphanius. His arguments are based on the New Testament experiences of Jesus' weariness, hunger and thirst like any other man. Nicephorus holds the view that divine economy required that Christ assume all aspects of human existence including ignorance. To quote 'Jesus willingly acted, desired, was ignorant and suffered as man.' (Antirrh. I, PG. 100. 328 BD. Quoted by Meyendorff. OP. cit. P. 49). In becoming incarnate the Logos assumed not an abstract, ideal humanity but the concrete humanity which existed in history after the fall, in order to save it. He was made of the same nature as we, but without sin. Nicephorus further argues that if Christ was undescrivable, His Mother, with whom He shared the same human nature, would have to be considered as undescrivable as well. Again the argument of the iconoclasts that the Eucharist is the only admissible image or symbol of Christ is refused by Nicephorus. Eucharist is the very reality of the Body and Blood of Christ, and precisely not an 'image'. By being assumed into Christ the Eucharistic elements do not lose their connection with this world' just as the Virgin Mary did not cease to be part of humanity by becoming the Mother of God.

In brief, the defence of icons was done on the basis of the faith in the Incarnation and the relevance of God's describability. The iconoclasts criticized images as elements of paganism and objects of idolatry. The Orthodox Christian theologians clarified that religions faith could be expressed also through matter, aesthetic experiences and bodily askesis, gestures and veneration

before holy images. To the Orthodox Christians, icons became an expression and a source of divine knowledge. Icons denote theology in colour, meditation of colour, and transfiguration beyond colour,

Iconoclastic controversy is the longest sustained doctrinal controversy in Christian history. Dispute over the propriety of the use of images in Christian worship and devotion involved Christological issues, political and sociological factors. The iconoclasts had also Jewish and Muslim cultural influences. Some scholars interpret this controversy as a 'social movement in disguise'. The iconoclasts destroyed all the icons they could and the Second Council of Nicea in 787 ordered the confiscation of all the iconoclastic literature. The Council became a successful transition on the part of the iconophiles and icons were adopted in the Eastern Church as a means of instruction, edification and communication. Icons became important with both pastoral and devotional meanings.

## **6. The Christological Issues**

There are many versions about the background of the opposition to icons. It is pointed out that the eighth-century campaign against icons originated in the plot of a Jew who had a conspiracy with the caliph Yazid II to ban all the icons from Christian Churches. This 'unholy alliance' of the Jewish mind with the Muslim mind forced, the Christian emperors to act against icons. Also it was a reaction against the hellenization of Christianity through images and rituals before icons. Opponents could see that veneration of icons is nothing other than

worship of idols. They argued that there is no biblical source for this and no commandment stands for the practice of worshipping an image of Christ or Saints. It did not come from the tradition either of Christ or of the apostles or of the fathers of the Church. The attack of the Old Testament prophets against the idolatrous practices of the Israelites is quoted by the leaders who fought against icons. 'You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth' (Ex. 20:4). This verse from the Bible is the powerful weapon of the iconoclasts. Here what is banned is the practice of depicting not merely God, but even His creatures. The Law of Moses is of great significance in the Christian tradition. Ps. 97:7 reads All worshippers of images are put to shame. This passage is another stick used by the opponents of icons.

Another passage is from the book of Isaiah 42:8: I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to graven images. This verse proves that the reverence appropriately paid to God could not be transferred to images and icons. In Malachi 1:11–15, we see a discussion of how the table of the Lord had been polluted. 'In those days lawless men came forth from Israel, and misled many, saying, Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles round about us, for since we separated from them many evils have come upon us. This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king. He authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil. Thus the iconoclasts argued that the veneration of icons is a practice which pollutes the

temple of the Lord. It is the revival of pagan practices: they claimed.

The iconoclasts emphasized the transcendence of Christ over this physical and material world which is the world of images. From the New Testament, John 4:24 is often quoted to oppose icons. 'God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth'. Here is an appeal to go even beyond the Old Testament restrictions of images. All kinds of matter, medium or physical cults and rituals are rebuked in this passage. The iconoclasts also elevated the imperial authority as it is clear from the decrees of the iconoclastic synod of A. D. 754. This synod declared that as Christ had originally sent out the apostles, so also now he has raised up his servants, the peers of the apostles the faithful emperors. The term faithful hear denotes all the authorities who fought against icons. It is further clarified by scholars that the issue of the imperial authority was the fundamental religious question in the iconoclastic controversy. This issue involves the very structure of religious authority as it was interpreted by the iconoclasts. They taught that every image is known to be a copy of some original. Constantine V developed this definition further by asserting that a genuine image was identical in essence with that which it portrays. The term *homo ousios* (identical in essence) is used to define this mystical relationship. It was in this sense that the Son was the image of the Father. No painting or picture could ever be an image of Christ in this sense. An image of Christ being used in worship was in fact the falsely so-called image of Christ, since it could not be identical in essence with the person of Jesus Christ himself.

On the other hand, the Eucharist was a true image for only it was identical in essence with Christ. The Eucharist was the

only true image of Christ because it is written: 'Do this in remembrance of me.' So, it is not permitted to portray him in an image or to carry out a remembrance of him in any other way. The Eucharist is the divine portrayal. The bread in the Eucharist is the real image of Christ's body. The iconoclastic Council of 754 declared that apart from the Eucharist there was not any other form or type capable of representing his incarnation in an image. Only the sacrament was the image of his life-giving body. Icons could not claim to such reverence.

St. Paul's praise of the cross in Gal. 6:14, and 1 Cor. 1:18, is quoted by iconoclasts asking another question: Is there anything written about the image or the icon to compare with what is written here about the cross? They worship the symbol of the cross only on account of the Lord crucified. It is the support of the faithful and worship of God. It is the life-giving symbol and not like the wicked graven image. The iconoclasts held the view that the custom of worshipping the cross was an unwritten tradition with apostolic authority unlike the icons. Among the iconoclasts there were people prepared to accept images of Christ and St. Mary but hesitated to accept the images of the apostles and the saints. Such believers were of opinion that it was one thing to pay the proper respect to the saints, quite another to address worship to them and yet another to portray them in worshipful images. The iconoclasts even ask: how do the icon-worshippers make and depict angels as though they had the form of a human being and were equipped with two wings? Angels were spirits, they could not be touched. Many of the eastern fathers were objected to the anthropomorphic images of angels. Passages like 'God is spirit' commanded that worship be in spirit and truth. The pagan temples are famous for their images of wood, metal or stone. The characteristics of Christian Churches are prayer, worship, thanksgiving

and sacrifice. Naturally there is no stand for wood, metal or stone. By icons, the pagan materialism of images was brought back to the Christian Churches. Thus the iconoclasts called the image-worshippers as idolators and degraded worshippers of creatures. The distinction between the image-worship of the pagan Greeks and that of the Christian Greeks is mere exercise of sophistry according to the iconoclasts. Actually there is no difference between them, they argued. In icon-worship, veneration is made to a plurality of objects. Two kinds of worship are involved in this case-worship given to Christ and that given to the images. Worship of an image cannot be addressed to Christ. 1 Cor. 8:5 says, For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet, for as there is only one God who is Christ Jesus. The iconoclasts took this passage to show that the image-worshippers are having many gods and many lords.

The opponents of icons argued that an icon is a Christological heresy. The person of Christ as the God-Man is not fully depicted in the images. An image of Christ does not picture Christ in both his divine and his human nature. The icon is only the pictorial representation of Christ's humanity. The divine nature of Christ cannot be circumscribed in a portrait. The deity cannot be circumscribed. The iconoclasts argued that Christ is incapable either of being circumscribed or of being comprehended or of suffering or of being grasped. Some of them permitted to draw a portrait of Christ before his suffering, death and resurrection. But they never permitted to make a portrait after the resurrection because even his body had inherited immortality and could not be circumscribed in a portrait. They also did not allow to picture the saving miracles and sufferings of Christ before his resurrection because these deeds



were performed by the one divine-human person. Against the argument of the supporters of icons that the Incarnation had made the image subject to pictorial representations, the iconoclasts clarified that it leads to the error of dividing the two natures of Christ. An artist who claims to draw an image of the human nature of Christ is really separating the image from the person of Christ. It violates the inseparable union of the two natures of Christ—divine and human. We cannot draw the image only of the flesh of Christ. The supporters of the heresy of Nestorianism could only do this. The iconoclasts firmly rooted their arguments in the definition of the person of Christ at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A. D. Chalcedon defined Christ in two natures without confusion, without change, without division and without separation. It is impossible to draw a portrait of the one person of Christ without confusion of the natures. Therefore it is a Christological heresy to make the portrait of Christ. The only proper use of the term 'image' in the case of Christ is to describe his relation to the Father. Since the divine nature remains without separation from the human nature, even in the suffering of Christ, it is impossible to draw a picture of the suffering aspect of Christ. Without the representation of the divine nature, Christ becomes only a creature with human nature alone.

As we have seen, all these arguments were refuted by spokesmen of the supporters of icons. The prohibitions of the Old Testament were seen by them as a reaction against misuse of images. The example of bronze-serpent as an image cannot be neglected. The Incarnation of Christ itself is the answer to the Christological dilemma. The concept of the image itself has deep spiritual meaning. The distinction between the *hypostasis* and *phusis* of Christ needs special study. The iconoclasts, they argued, lacked a sufficient and appropriate view of

the hypostasis. The two parties appeared to disagree with the understanding of the natures of Christ and the relation between them. Above all, the clash between the imperial authority and monastic piety stood first among the reasons for disagreement.

## **7. The Psychological meaning of Icon**

Glorification of God is the essence of Christianity. The whole creation participates in the worship of the Church. This cosmic character of Christianity is vividly pictured through art. An artist in the Eastern Christian Tradition, acknowledging that God is the author and authority of every kind of artistic imagination, brings the works of his creative artistic imagination before the throne of his Heavenly Master. Hence, the dome of the Church building, the offering, the incense, and the tithes—all these aspects form an important and integral framework of the liturgical life of the believer. An icon explains the transfiguring power of art and through the veneration of icons a believer is transfigured. Icons are sacred representations of Christ, the Mother of God, apostles, saints, angels and events of divine history. The theological basis of icons is the fact of Incarnation. Christ Himself is the supreme icon. He is the incarnate Word of God, the God-Man. An icon of Christ is the authentic testimony of His Incarnation and all other icons proclaim this event. It is the testimony of man's participation in divine life.

An icon is an expression of the divine Revelation, just like the Holy Scripture. The symbolic pictorial language of icons can be heard and understood by the believers who are initiated to

the spiritual realm of the artist. It needs years of devotion, prayer, fasting and silence to create an icon. Through an icon the believer participates in both God and World, transfiguring the world for the glorification of God. The icon is theology in colour, the agent of theosis or deification and the storehouse of divine energy. In the history of the Church we see that Christians of the non-Hellenic tradition were generally adverse to the icons. It was in Syria the icons originated but it was in the Byzantine empire the icons flourished. Christians of Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Armenia and India (the non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches) were not directly involved in the iconoclastic controversy and therefore they simply ignored the development of the icon and its theology. Some of their leaders even questioned the validity of such a developed theology. But in a later period the liturgical value of icons were re-instated by their ancestors. This writer is of opinion that the theology of icons really help us to understand and proclaim the meaning of Christian worship to this world of rationalism and spiritual hedonism. The Armenian Apostolic Church developed the *Hachkar* or icon in stones. The Coptic Church developed a Peculiar style of symbolic representations in clothes and curtains. Attempts are made in the Indian Orthodox Church to assimilate Indian cultural art in its symbolism sustaining the valuable heritage from both Persian and Syrian artistic forms.

As we have seen, Christian mystery can be expressed in manifold ways. The iconographic tradition of the Church is equally valid as other manifestations of faith—gestures, signs, matter used in liturgy, scriptural interpretations, the so-called dogma, the vestments used in the liturgy and so on. The line and colour of the icons convey the same message of delivering a sermon based on the Scripture. The icons convey the ideas

set forth in colours. The word announces the message in written letters. The unwritten tradition of iconography is equally important as the unwritten traditions of the Church such as worshipping towards the east and worship of the cross and relics of saints. Icons are intelligible expressions of the reality which surpasses our mode of understanding. In other words, an icon is a supra-sensible reality in aesthetic expression. It is a illogical structure with logical meaning. It is not mere translation of dogmas into a language of conventional signs. It is not transcendence of intelligence and the senses, but transformation of both.

The psychological meaning of icons can be traced from the practices of the gentile Christians. Before their conversion they were used to decorate the walls of their houses with figures and pictures like that of doves, fishes, sailors, peacocks, shepherds, different varieties of fruits from the soil and animals of symbolic meaning. In their transformed life, these figures and pictures acquired new meaning. The dove become the symbol of the reborned soul, the peacocks that of immortality, the fish and food grains that of eucharistic food. The shepherd devoted Christ. The vineyard acquired the meaning of the Church. These symbols characterized faith, hope, love, sacrifice, prayer, holiness, beauty and truth.

We can trace the beginning of early Christian art to the last years of the first century. The early Christians represented their faith in words, deeds and in colours and artistic forms-on walls of the catacombs, on ceilings and walls of the tombs of their departed ones and on the marbles and plaster slabs that covered up their graves. Anthropomorphic personifications were also made in the early Christian art. Symbols with eschatological connotations were also used. The picture of a praying man

with his gaze directed upwards, the arms outstretched as in prayer was commonly used. This picture is called *orante*. The figure of the good shepherd and that of sheep were seen on almost every tomb built in the catacombs of the early centuries. The figure of the fish was used as the mystic representation of Christ. A little palm branch engraved on the decorated ceilings of the sepulchral chambers denoted the victory over death. A dove or a pair of doves was the symbol of the soul freed from the body. A ship at anchor was a common symbol for faith. These figures were venerated as a comfort to the soul. Contrary to the greek idols which manifested sensuous pleasures, these Christian symbols generated a spiritual experience to the believer. These symbols actually enabled the believer to worship God in truth and spirit.

Among the Romans and the Greeks, it was a common practice to make portraits of relatives and distinguished people. The Byzantine art was developed by assimilating Roman, Greek and early Christian artistic elements. As emperor constantine secured power in 313 A.D, a remarkable progress was seen in the sphere of Christian art. The emperor wished to make Constantinople the second Rome. All kinds of artists were invited to the Capital and gradually iconography flourished in these centres. Byzantine painters followed the pattern of the Greek paintings which characterized a world beyond time and space. Spiritual realities were painted in a mystical, rhythmic manner. With the rise and progress of the Byzantine empire, iconography also progressed with new strength, style and vigour. Classical and Christian elements were united to replace new forms and ideas. It is pointed out that the Good Shepherd was replaced by the noble and gracious figures of Christ in glory and of Christ as Judge and King. The veneration of the imperial image also

made an impact on the cult of icons. Honour or insult given to the image was considered to be honour or insult to the emperor himself. Christ was shown in His Majestic seat signifying that Christ presided at the altar behind Himself. Saints, angels and other heavenly beings are pictured as sharing in the liturgy. Angels were also presented as hovering above the altar. Some of them were pictured as moving in procession towards the heavenly beings.

Pictures of the savior, the Apostles etc. were seen in ancient worship centres of the Church even before Constantine. They had a function in the worship rather than objects for decoration. The local synod of Elvira forbade depicting the subjects of worship and veneration on Church walls. The council of Elvira (c. 300 A. D) took such a step to check this practice not to become idol worship. When Epiphanius, Bishop of Constantia (the ancient Salamis) travelled in Palestine and western part of Asia Minor at the end of the fourth century he saw the pictures of Christ, Mother of God, archangels and prophets, Peter, Andrew, John, Paul and of the apostles as a group of Abraham, Jacob and Moses. We can rightly infer that these pictures were used in worship of the early Church. Leaders of the Christian Community used to give warning that it may become dangerous leading to the gentile practice of idolatry. A synagogue painted all sides with Old Testament scenes which was destroyed in A. D. 256 could be brought to light by recent excavations at Dura Europos near middle Euphrates. A Church was also discovered at its neighbourhood which was decorated with paintings of both New Testament and Old Testament scenes. A hermit by name Nilus of Mount Sinai (died around 430 A. D) in a letter addressed to prefect Olympidorus allows religious pictures as far as they are helpful to edify the simple

people who were unable to read the scriptures and to prompt them to imitate the examples of the saints. Since portable panel paintings of saints which belong to the sixth century are now known, we can assess that the veneration and contemplation of icons was practised by common people during the time of emperor Justinian. Wooden plates coloured and painted with pictures of saints preserved in the monastery of St. Katherine on Sinai are identified as belonging to the late fifth century. Veneration of icons in the Byzantine empire was at its peak during 8th and 9th centuries.

Eventually distortions and mal-practices crept into this scene. Improper forms of veneration were seen in the Church and these practices were vehemently criticized. Without paying sufficient attention and reverence to the liturgy and Church services, people crowded around the icons, kissed them and even scraped paints from them. There were the customs of even taking icons as god-parents for one's children, of adding paint scraped from icons to the Eucharistic wine and of laying the sacrament upon an icon so as to receive it from the hands of a saint. Some icons were supposed to possess miraculous powers, pieces of wood or paint from an icon were stolen and taken back to homes. These distorted practices led to the iconoclastic controversy. The common mass without much edification of the idea of veneration, sometimes took the adoration of icons too literally adoring not the person or the idea represented by the images but the image itself or the material of which it was made. The Church was forced to bring sound theological reasons to the practice of veneration in the midst of tricks, traps and group fanaticism.

The movement against icons was not only a reaction against the abuses crept into the veneration of icons. Islamic

influences from the eastern provinces of the Byzantine empire, the antagonistic mentality of the bishops from the eastern provinces towards other bishops, the whole-hearted support from Leo III the first iconoclastic emperor, the support given by the army of Leo III—all these factors helped the iconoclastic movement. It is to be noted that the army was mainly recruited from the conservative Christian peasantry of the Asia Minor province. Political jealousy and common reaction against the monasteries of that period became yet another reason for the rapid growth of the iconoclastic movement. The growth of monasteries was against the interest of the authorities. Naturally, Leo III tried to break the power of the monks with Greek background. Most of the scholars are of opinion that iconoclasm was the protest of the eastern Christians against Hellenic culture. The Byzantine artistic works were seen as a by-product of the Greek culture. The Council of Nicea in 787 took a strong position against the opponents of icons.

It is interesting to examine the background of the council of Nicea in 787 A. D. The army tried its best to carry out the edict of Leo III on the destruction of icons in 726. But the Church strongly opposed this edict. Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople and Roman Pope Gregory II were against this edict. Some of the local bishops were forced to support Leo III and the emperor convoked a council in 730 to eliminate icons in which his supporters attended. Patriarch Germanus who refused to sign the decree of this council was deposed and Anastasius, a supporter of Leo III was put into the patriarchal office. Gregory III who succeeded Gregory II as the Pope of Rome convoked a council in Rome and this council excommunicated the supporters of Leo III. Constantine V (741–775) who succeeded Leo III was a strong supporter of the iconoclasts. He convened a council of 338 bishops in A.D. 754.



This council summoned at a place called Hieria condemned the veneration of icons. The decisions of this council against the icon are known to us through the decisions and proceedings of the second council of Nicea in 787. Scholars are of opinion that the motive behind the council of Hieria was to bring the Church under the control of the imperial power. This hidden motive was there in the support of the emperor given to the iconoclasts. These vehement attacks against icons were fruitfully resisted by the Church with the leadership of John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite who fought for the icons with theological arguments. Their discourses and treatises in favour of iconography resulted in a firm basis and great stimulus for its development.

Constantine V was very particular to abolish all kinds of artistic representations of faith. He showed utmost intolerance towards monks and monasteries. Fearing total annihilation of monks and monasteries, many of the monks left the country to settle down at the western part of Syria and Palestine. Leo IV the successor of Constantine V showed certain respect towards monks and monasteries which in turn resulted in the re-gathering of dissipated energy by the supporters of icons. It can be rightly assessed that Leo IV was very much influenced by his wife Irene, a devoted lady from Athens who supported the icon-worship. Leo IV died in 780 A.D. and his son Constantine VI was a minor, hence Irene ruled the whole Byzantine empire. Irene fully supported the icons and restored them. With her support, Patriarch Tarasius of Constantinople called an ecumenical council for the restoration of icons in 786. With the support of the iconoclasts, the troops of the city, hostile to the icon-worship, rushed into the Church and forced the council to disperse. Irene tactfully replaced the

disobedient troops by new members loyal to her wish. Thus another council was convened in Nicea in the year 787. The iconoclasts could not win the army this time. The second council of Nicea is considered as the Seventh Ecumenical Council by the Byzantine Orthodox Church. More than 300 bishops attended. Seven meetings were held at Nicea and the eighth and concluding session was held in the imperial palace at Constantinople. Theological arguments for icons were compiled in this Council. The Council declared: the Incarnation of the Word of God is real and not mere illusion. Icons belong to the ecclesiastical tradition handed down through the centuries. Both the oral and the verbal traditions of the Church are to be preserved. Artistic representation belongs to both the oral and verbal traditions and it is in accordance with the message of the gospel preached by Christ and His apostles. The Church gives veneration to the holy icons just as the figure of the life-giving cross. To pay witness to the salvific message of Christ, paintings and icons should be set forth in Churches, on the sacred vessels and on the vestments. Icons of Christ, Virgin Mary, the angels of God, of saints can also be depicted on walls on public places and houses. The honourable veneration given to icons is not adoration (*latreia*) or worship. The Greek word *proskunesis* is the correct usage for this veneration. It is not idol worship. The Church does not give adoration to icons, which is due to God alone. The Church venerates icons just as cross, and the Holy Bible. The Council allowed that incense and lights may be offered before these icons according to ancient practice.

Contributions of empress Theodora for the restoration of icon worship deserve special mentioning. After Irene was dethroned in A. D. 802, Nicephorus (802-811) ruled Byzantium.

Stauracius, the son of Nicephorus became the ruler in 811. He could rule only for a few months because of his tragic death in the same year, Michael I (811-813) succeeded him. He was deposed by his military commander Leo, an Armenian by birth, known in history as Leo V the Armenian (813-820). He was succeeded by Michael II (820-829) and then by his son Theophilus (829-842). Theodora was the wife of Theophilus. She came from Paphlagonia in Asia Minor and naturally she was a strong supporter of icons. Among the above-mentioned rulers, Leo V, the Armenian was the most fanatic iconoclast. He removed Patriarch Nicephorus who supported icons and installed one Theodotus in the office of the Patriarchal throne. A second iconoclastic council was held with the initiative of Leo V in 815 A. D. This Council re-affirmed the iconoclastic decisions of Hieriea (754) and condemned the decisions of Nicea II (787). Iconoclastic policy was continued by the predecessors of Leo V, by name Michael II and Theophilus. In 842, Theophilus died and Theodora became the ruler of the empire, her son Michael being a minor was silent for a long period and icon worship was officially restored by Theodora. She removed Patriarch John the Grammarian from the Patriarchal throne and Methodius was made the Patriarch of Constantinople. John the Grammarian was one of the strong supporters of iconoclastic group. On the otherside, Patriarch Nicephorus and Theodore the Studite supported the icon with theological arguments.

## 8. The Iconostasis

The Greek term iconostasis means literally 'a picture-stand'. In Christian context it means the screen separating the altar from the nave where the main body of the worshippers are assembled. This screen is entirely covered with icons or pictures. It is made of wood and metal or alloys. This is a very prominent feature of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Oriental Orthodox Churches of the non-Chalcedonian tradition use only a curtain or decorated cloth in this respect whereas in the Byzantine Orthodox Churches we see a historical development of this screen.

It is to be noted that in the earlier centuries the iconostasis was made of stone or marble in the Orthodox liturgical tradition. Earlier, at Constantinople pictures or ancient forms of icons were hung on the altar screen on festivals and these were like large medallions made of mosaic or painted with brush. Eventually, these began to increase in number and tended to become a more permanent feature of the screen in the Byzantine tradition. Now the term iconostasis denotes a solid wooden screen full of icons and other pictorial representations. The developed form of iconostasis has gates and large pictures even gold plated. It appears to be a development in Russia in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Under the talented artists Andrei Rublev of Russia and Theophanes of Greece the Byzantine screen was raised in height so that it completely hid the altar from the congregation. As a result, the icons themselves were increased in size from half-length to full-length figures. The stone screen with carved panels and columns is

known to be a special feature of Byzantium and the eastern Mediterranean area.

The spiritual insight of the iconostasis is that it veils heaven from the earth. The altar denotes heaven and the saints who are depicted on the screen are the mediators between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven. In the Orthodox Christian understanding, worship is participation with the heavenly beings or active communication between the living and the departed. When the celebrant speaks from the altar obscured by the screen it is as the voice of God speaking to his people on earth. When the gates are opened and the celebrants come forth from the altar to the people at the reading of the gospel and the giving of holy communion, it is like the Incarnation when Christ came forth from heaven to earth for the salvation of the human race. Another relevant interpretation is that the iconostasis shows the unknowable God. In His 'ousia' (essence) God is unknown. In His *energeia* (works) God is partially known. He reveals Himself to the initiated—those who grow in faith, worship, sanctity and goodness.

In the Oriental Orthodox Churches (The Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Syrian and Indian Orthodox Churches) the iconostasis is not employed as we seen in the Byzantine tradition. But at certain portions in the liturgical worship, a veil or curtain is drawn across the sanctuary. This curtain or veil will be depicted by the pictures of saints, martyrs, apostles or Biblical events.

The icons on the iconostasis communicate a coherent account of the divine economy. They express and enhance the symbolic value of the structure itself. They also provide access to that which is represented on them. To the Orthodox Christian, the simplest form of devotion involves the kissing of an icon, the

lighting of a candle by its side, and making the sign of the cross. The stands on which single icons are displayed will usually be covered with material. Its colour may vary with the season, as will that of vestments. The solemn tones of lent will be replaced at Easter season with the most radiant colours available.



## Appendix

### 1- Decree on icons by the Second Council of Nicea 787 A. D.

'We keep unchanged all the ecclesiastical tradition handed down to us whether in writing or verbally one of which is the making of pictorial representation, agreeable to the history of the preaching of the Gospel, a tradition useful in many respects but especially in this, that so the incarnation of the word of God is shown forth as real and not merely phantastic.....'

'..... just as the figure of the precious and lifegiving cross so also the venerable and holy images, as well as painting and mosaic as of other fit materials, should be set forth in the holy churches of God, and on the sacred vessels and on the vestments and on hangings and in pictures both in houses and by the wayside, to wit, the figure of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, of our spotless Lady, the Mother of God, of the honourable angels, of all saints and of all pious people .....and to these should be given due salutation and honourable reverence, not indeed that true worship of faith which pertains alone to the divine nature; but to these, as to the figure of the precious and life-giving cross and to the Book of the Gospels to the other holy objects, incense and lights may be offered according to the ancient pious custom '

### 2. 82 th Canon of the Trullan Council. A. D. 692

'In certain reproductions of venerable images, the precursor is pictured indicating the lamb with his finger. This

representation was adopted as a symbol of grace. It was a hidden figure of that true lamb who is Christ our God, shown to us according to the Law. Having thus welcomed these ancient figures and shadows as symbols of the truth transmitted to the Church, we prefer today grace and truth themselves as a fulfillment of this law. Therefore, in order to expose to the sight of all, at least with the help of painting, that which is perfect, we decree that henceforth Christ our God must be represented in His human form, and not in the form of the ancient lamb

### 3. Germanus I (715–30), the Patriarch of Constantinople

'In the eternal memory of the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of His passion, His saving death, and the redemption of the world which results from them, we have received the tradition of representing Him in His human form—i.e. in His visible theophany—understanding that in this way we exalt the humiliation of God the word.'

### 4. John of Damascus-Treatise on the Orthodox Faith.

In former times, God, without body or form, could in no way be represented. But today, since God has appeared in flesh and lived among men, I can represent what is visible in God. I do not venerate matter, but I venerate the Creator of matter, who became matter for my sake, who assumed life in the flesh, and who through matter, accomplished by salvation...

We fall down and worship not the material but that which is imaged: just as we do not worship the material of which the Gospels are made, not the material of the cross, but that which these typify'.



## 5. Theodore the Studite: Abbot of the Constantinopolitan monastery of Studios

An image can be the image only of an hypostasis, for the image of the nature is inconceivable. The icon of Christ is not only the image of 'the man Jesus', but also of the incarnate Logos. The meaning of the Christian Gospel lies precisely in the fact that the Logos assumed all the characteristics of a man, including describability, and His icon is a permanent witness of this fact.

The humanity of Christ which makes the icons possible is a 'new humanity', having been fully restored to communion with God-deified in virtue of the communication of idioms, bearing fully again the image of God. This fact is to be reflected in iconography as a form of art: the artist thus receives the quasi-sacramental function'..... The Christian artist is God Himself, making man in His own image: 'The fact that God made man in His image and likeness shows that iconography is a divine action.'

## 6. Walter Lowrie in 'Art in the Early Church'

It is commonly said that icons originated in Syria....Some of the peculiarities of the Byzantine icons are definitely inherited from the Syrian art. The Syrian art on one hand exalted the spiritual part of man, and on the other hand it was strongly inclined to make the spiritual visible in material forms. The art which Syria produced was characterised by a strongly accentuated inwardness and transcendental other-worldliness. It is already mentioned that the custom of presenting the figures in a frontal aspect was a peculiarity of the Syrian art. The contribution of Syria to Christian art after the middle of the fourth century

is to be found chiefly in the creation of pictures of sacred persons conceived as ideal portraits, portraits of souls.

### 7. Fr. Gervase Mathew, British Byzantinologist

The veneration of the imperial image is behind the cult of icons. Honour or insult given to the image is given to the emperor himself. The secular concept was transferred to the new official religion. Increasingly Christ was shown in the apse to signify that He presided at the altar behind Him. The presence of the angels and saints sharing in the liturgy was signified by their representations as they hovered above the altar or moved in procession towards it. If the image was conceived as a proxy honor paid it would pass to the original. This conception was derived from official secular art, not from religions (Byzantine Aesthetics).

### 8. Leonid Ouspensky in 'The Meaning of Icons'

By the incarnation of the Son of God, man received the possibility to restore the likeness to God with the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit, i.e. to make an icon of himself by inner doing. Man received also the possibility to reveal his grace given state to others in word-images and visual images. In other words, he can create an external icon out of the matter surrounding him, which has been sanctified by the descent of God upon earth. Thus holiness is the realisation of the possibilities given to man by the Divine Incarnation. The icon is the means of revealing this realisation, a pictorial exposition of this example.

...The presence of the all sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, holiness, cannot be depicted by any human means, since it is

invisible in external physical sight. But while remaining invisible to the unilluminated eye, holiness is evident to the eye of the Spirit. The Byzantine Church indicates the holiness of a saint by visible means in icons, using symbolical language, such as haloes, and particular forms, colours and lines. This symbolism indicates what cannot be conveyed directly. But by this means, revelation coming from the world on high, becomes manifest for every man and accessible to his understanding and contemplation.

## 9. John Meyendorff in 'Byzantine Theology'

The iconoclastic controversy had a lasting influence upon the intellectual life of Byzantium. Four aspects of this influence seem particularly relevant to theological development.

A. At the time of the Persian wars of Emperor Heraclius in the seventh century, Byzantium turned away culturally from its Roman past and toward the East. The great conformation with Islam, which was reflected in the origins and character of iconoclasm, made this trend even more definite. Deprived of political protection by the Byzantine emperors, with whom they were in doctrinal conflict, the popes turned to the Franks and thus affiliated themselves with the emerging new Latin Middle Ages. As a result, the social, cultural, and political background of this separation became more evident; the two halves of the Christian world began to speak different languages, and their frames of reference in theology began to diverge more sharply than before.

Byzantium's turn to the East, even if it expressed itself in a certain cultural osmosis with the Arab world, especially during the reign of Theophilus, did not mean a greater understanding between Byzantine Christianity and Islam; the confrontation

remained fundamentally hostile, and this hostility prevented real dialogue. John of Damascus who himself lived in Arab-dominated Palestine, spoke of Mohammed as the 'forerunner of the Anti-Christ.' Giving second-hand quotations from the Koran, he presented the new religion as nothing more than gross superstition and immorality. Later-Byzantine literature on Islam rarely transcended this level of pure polemics.

However, even if this orientation eastward was not in itself an enrichment, Byzantium remained for several centuries the real capital of the Christian world. Culturally surpassing the Carolingian West and militarily strong in resisting Islam, Byzantine Christianity kept its universalist missionary vision, which expressed itself in a successful evangelization of the Slavs and other Eastern nations. But its later theological development took place in an exclusively Greek setting. Still bearing the title of 'Great Church of Constantinople-New Rome' it became known to both its Latin competitors and its Slavic disciples as the 'Greek' Church.

B. Whatever role was played in the Orthodox victory over the iconoclasts by high ecclesiastical dignitaries and such theologians as Patriarch Nicephorus, the real credit belonged to the Byzantine monks who resisted the emperors in overwhelming numbers. The emperors, especially Leo III and Constantine V, expressed more clearly than any of their predecessors a claim to caesaropapism. Thus the iconoclastic controversy was largely a confrontation between the state and a non-conformist, staunchly independent monasticism, which assumed the prophetic role of standing for the independence of the Gospel from the 'world.' The fact that this role was assumed by the monks, and not by the highest canonical authority of the

Church, underlines the fact that the issue was the defense, not of the Church as an institution, but of the Christian faith as the way to eternal salvation.

The monks, of course, took their role very seriously and preserved, even after their victory, a peculiar sense of responsibility for the faith, as we saw in the case of Theodore the Studite. Theologically they maintained a tradition of faithfulness to the past, as well as a sense of the existential relevance of theology as such. Their role in later-Byzantine theological development remained decisive for centuries.

C. The theological issue between the Orthodox and the iconoclasts was fundamentally concerned with the icon of Christ, for belief in the divinity of Christ implied a stand on the crucial point of God's essential indescribability and on the Incarnation, which made Him visible. Thus the icon of Christ is the icon *par excellence* and implies a confession of faith in the Incarnation.

The iconoclasts, however, on theological grounds not only to this icon, but also to the use of any religious pictures, except the cross, because, as their Council of 754 proclaims, they opposed 'all paganism.' Any veneration of images was equated with idolatry. If the goal pursued by Constantine V to 'purify' Byzantine Christianity, not only of the image cult, but also of monasticism, had been achieved, the entire character of Eastern Christian piety and its ethos would have evolved differently. The victory of Orthodoxy meant, for example that religious faith could be expressed, not only in propositions, in books, or in personal experience, but also through man's power over matter, through aesthetic experience, and through gestures and bodily attitudes before holy images. All this implied a

philosophy of religion and an anthropology; worship, the liturgy, religious consciousness involved the whole man, without despising any functions of the soul or of the body, and without leaving any of them to the realm of the secular.

D. Of all the cultural families of Christianity—the Latin, the Syrian, the Egyptian, or the Armenian—the Byzantine was the only one in which art became inseparable from theology. The debates of the eighth and ninth centuries have shown that in the light of the Incarnation art could not retain a 'neutral' function, that it could and even must express the faith. Thus through their style, through symbolic compositions, through the elaborate artistic programs covering the walls of Byzantine churches, through the permanent system which presided over the composition of the Byzantine iconostasis, icons became an expression and a source of divine knowledge. The good news about God's becoming man; about the presence among men of a glorified and deified humanity, first in Christ, but also through Him and the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary and in the saints—all this 'adornment of the Church' was expressed in Byzantine Christian art, Eugene Trubetskoi, a Russian philosopher of the early twentieth century, called this expression 'contemplation in colors.'

#### 10. Nicholas Zernov in 'The Christian East'.

Many of these *ikons* are highly revered, and have been made the vehicles of special grace; healings and other exceptional manifestations of divine favour take place in connection with them, and some of them are called 'wonder-working'.

Nothing is more misunderstood by the West than the Eastern Orthodox attitude to the holy pictures. Persistent accusations

of superstition against the Eastern Christians are based on their customs and practices connected with the veneration of *ikons*. The analytical Western mind draws a sharp line of demarcation between the object and its name, between the person and his portrait, between spirit and body. The East is more aware of their profound interdependence. To the Eastern mentality the name of a person forms a part of his personality; his portrait also stands in close relation to the man himself. The East believes that the Incarnation revealed the existence of an organic unity between the divine and the creaturely; it proved that bodily things no less than spirit can be the vehicles of divine action, and that both are able to respond to it, though in a different way. For an Eastern Christian the *ikons* represent Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, and the Saints, and the very word 'represent' implies that one can speak of some presence of the heavenly persons in their images. An Eastern Christian never identifies the person with its representation, but he believes that the spiritual meeting of Jesus Christ and his Saints with the members of the Church is deepened and strengthened in being focused in the *ikons*. Wood, paint and metal, transformed by art and prayer, can form a meeting-point between God and man, no less than between mind and mind; and holy souls departed aid this prayer of the eyes no less than that of the lips. The following illustration may help to explain this point. A piece of rough marble and the statue made from it, though materially identical, are not the same thing; the creative genius of man makes the stone into the vehicle of a new spiritual power capable of profoundly influencing other persons. If so much can be done by an artist, the prayer of the Church, the action of divine grace, the response of a Saint, can affect matter even more profoundly and transform an *ikon* into a source of help and inspiration for those Christians who come

into contact with it; this is how the miracles are performed. The veneration of *ikons* is only another example of the sacramental principle accepted by all Christians. If water in baptism is essential to the cleansing from sin, if bread and wine at the Eucharist serve men's communion with God, then *ikons*, too, provide a special facility for fellowship between the Saints and members of the Church here on earth.

If the West thinks that the East is superstitious in its veneration of *ikons*, the Christian East suspects those who object to it of the dangerous heresy which believes that matter is something unclean and evil, and that the highest type of worship can dispense with it and be entirely spiritual. This for the Orthodox is a denial of the Incarnation and a complete misunderstanding of the true purpose of human life. Man's task is to make the world holy, not to get rid of it. Men are not pure spirits; the Church believes in the resurrection of the body and not in its final destruction.

### 11. Jaroslav Pelikan in 'The Spirit of Eastern Christendom'

The reverence for images was deeply seated in the piety of Eastern faithful and was passionately defended by the monks, but it remained for John of Damascus, Theodore of Studios, and the patriarch Nicephorus to provide it with an elaborate theological defense. Like the thought of the iconoclasts, iconophile theology has been divided into several periods: the 'traditional' the 'christological', and the 'scholastic.' For our purpose, however, the loyalty to the images expressed in what was believed by the people, the defense of the images expressed in what was taught by the theologians, and the victory of the images expressed in what was confessed by the orthodox councils should all



be treated together. Whether one calls the system of Theodore an 'iconosophy compounded of superstition, magic, and scholasticism,' or whether one regards Nicephorus as 'perhaps the most penetrating among the defenders of the cult of images,' the doctrinal definition of images as icons won out over the doctrinal definition of images as idols largely through the theological clarification provided by these three thinkers of the eighth and ninth centuries and by some of their lesser-known associates. It was under their leadership that orthodoxy decreed 'that the venerable and holy icons be erected, just as the form of the revered and life-giving cross is...in the holy churches of God..., namely, the icon of our God and Savior Jesus Christ' as well as that of our immaculate Lady, the Holy Mother of God, and those of the revered angels and of all the saints and holy men.' In reflecting on the relation between this formulation and the previous history of the church, the iconophiles saw themselves as the legitimate heirs of ancient orthodoxy and saw the iconoclasts as standing in continuity with ancient enemies of the true faith. Older heresies had erred on the humanity of Christ, iconoclasm on his deity; older persecutors had warred against the living saints, these men even against the dead saints. While such persecutors had been guilty of evil deeds, heretics had until now been content with evil words, but the iconoclasts had resorted to deeds as well as to words in their campaign against the images. So it was that the devil led the enemies of the church from one extreme to the other, from worshiping the images of men and animals in paganism to destroying the images of Christ and the saints in iconoclasm.

As the iconoclastic identification of images as idols rested on a particular definition of what an authentic image ought to be, so the iconophile defense of the images as icons proceeded from

its own and quite different definition. This definition took various verbal and logical forms. On the basis of the apostle Paul, John of Damascus defined an image as 'a mirror and a figurative type, appropriate to the dullness of our body.' On the basis of Dionysius the Areopagite, Theodore of Studios defined it as 'a likeness of that of which it is the image, in itself showing by imitation the character of its archetype... the true in the likeness, the archetype in the image.' Other definitions, some of them by these same thinkers, appeared without explicit reference to the supporting authority of Scripture or tradition. Theodore of Studios called the image 'a kind of seal and representation, bearing within itself the authentic form of that from which it also gets its name.' Apparently drawing upon pre-Christian usage, John of Damascus defined an image as 'a triumph, a manifestation, and a monument in commemoration of a victory,' in this case the victory of Christ and his followers over the demons. Again, he defined it as 'a likeness, an illustration, and a representation of something, showing forth in itself that which is imaged.' One of the most complete and abstract of such definitions was provided by Nicephorus, who itemized the component elements of the image as: 'a likeness of an archetype, having impressed upon it the form of what it represents by similarity, differing from it only by the difference of essence in accordance with the materials [of which they are made]; or an imitation and similitude of the archetype, differing [from it] in essence and substance; or a product of some technical skill, shaped in accordance with the imitation of the archetype, but differing from it in essence and substance.'

Underlying all these definitions, even the most abstract ones, was the idea that an image had to be understood and defined on the basis of that to which it was related, its 'to what'. 'This idea implied, on the one hand, a close relation and, on the

other hand, a precise distinction, between the image and that which was imaged. 'By nature,' then, Christ is one thing, and the image of Christ is another' and yet there is an identity because they are called the same.' The identity was not, as iconoclast theory had maintained, an identity of essence between the image and the prototype. On the contrary, an image had to be 'a likeness that characterizes the prototype in such a way that it also maintains some distinction from it.' Even before the controversy over the images, such definitions had been formulated by Maximus, who had noted that 'although an image bears an immutable and, in a sense, a perfect likeness to its archetype, nevertheless it is different from it in essence,' especially because, in the case of Christian images, the original was living and the image was not; hence it was essential to distinguish between likeness and identity. Artistic skill could imitate the true nature of that which it represented, but this did not make the original and its image identical in essence. From all of this it followed that when one paid worship to an image, one was thereby worshiping not the essence of the image, but rather the imprint of the prototype that had been stamped as a seal onto the image.

By clarifying the nature of the image and of its relation to its prototype, the iconophile theologians were able to put their defense of the icons into the framework of a much more comprehensive classification of images. On the basis of Pseudo-Dionysius, they could interpret the universe as a graduated hierarchy of images, in which there existed a close relation and a creative involvement between the image and its prototype, but not an identity of essence. In various developments of this stratification of images, John of Damascus identified several senses of the term 'image' in Christian language about God: the Son of God as the image of the Father; the Father's eternal will

to create images and paradigms for the visible world; the visible things that acted as physical types of the invisible prototypes; man as a creature 'in the image of God' and therefore 'called into being by God as an imitation'; the Old Testament 'types', which fore-shadowed what was to come in the New; images erected as memorials, whether in books or in pictures, in words or in objects, in commemoration of glorious deeds in the past, pointing backward as the Old Testament shadows had pointed forward. As a special example of the last category, the icons could justify themselves in opposition to the attempt to see them as Christian idols. Despite the obviously Neoplatonic implications of speaking about preexistent images on the basis of which God had created the particular realities of this visible world, such a classification provided a general setting in support of the case being made by the iconophiles.

The case was strengthened, in their judgment, by their ability to appeal to what must be called 'psychological' arguments for the icons. Such arguments began quite early in the campaign for Christian images. Writing in the first or second decade of the seventh century, Leontius of Neapolis asked his readers whether one would not, for example, kiss the clothing of his departed wife in her memory, and maintained that Christian icons were no more than especially vivid examples of such memorials. Similarly, John of Damascus noted: 'I have often seen those with a sense of longing, who, having caught sight of the garment of their beloved, embrace the garments as though it were the beloved person himself'. Christian worship of the icons was an instance of this same devotion, in which respect and affection were being paid to the garment, but were in fact addressed to the person of the departed, be it Christ or his mother or some other saint.

## 12. Metropolitan Ermogen about the Kazan Icon

Although a most marvelous miracle took place in our time through the merciful visit of the Creator of all that is good, our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, and She Who gave Him birth, our Most Pure and Blessed Queen and Theotokos, the Virgin Mary—the appearance of a marvellous miracle-working icon in the glorious town of Kazan, how can I, unworthy as I am, recount this with my unworthy lips? However, placing my hope in the ineffable generosity of the Son of God and in the prayers of the Virgin, I shall dare to begin my story with the words of the universal teacher.

*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation....who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings ... (2 Cor. 1. 3-4; Eph. 1.3).* The news of God's merciful visit to us, the appearance of the icon of the Mother of God, flashed like lightning throughout the Russian land. I, unworthy though I am, was a witness of the marvellous manner in which God and the Mother of God brought forth the miraculous icon from the depths of the earth, but I delayed in writing about it until now, partly through feeble-mindedness, carelessness and soul-destroying lassitude, and partly from fear of my unworthiness....

As Thou prayest to Thy Son, Christ the Lord, for all—help Thou me also in my writing, for Thou savest all who turn to Thy sovereign intercession. Many times have I remembered my sins and shed tears, aware of my unworthiness. However it came to my mind that it would be unjust to let fall into oblivion God's mysteries and His ineffable, merciful gifts to us.... Grant me, O Thou Who art glorified in hymns, the gift of speaking and writing about everything that I have seen and heard of Thy

miraculous icon. and intercede for all of us, O Heavenly Queen! Although I am unworthy of praising Thee deem me worthy, O Sovereign Virgin, to glorify Thee for Thy ineffable goodness to us....

This is what happened in the year 7087 (1579). On June 23, the Feast of St. Agrippina, there was a fire in the newly-converted town of Kazan, twenty-five years after its capture, which we ourselves witnessed. At noon a fire started in the house of a certain warrior of the tsar, Daniil Onuchin, who lived near the Church of St. Nicholas, whose icon is popularly known as 'of Tula'. Only a small part of the settlement remained unharmed, as well as that half of the town where the cathedral church and the archbishop's place stand; the greater part of the settlement and all the commercial area, as well as the cloister of the Transfiguration of Our Saviour in the town, and the Grand Duke's palace were, alas, devoured by fire and razed to the ground....

But God, Who loves men, seeing His people's longsuffering and faith... and in order that the Orthodox Faith, the true Christian faith, of the Greek Rule, be affirmed and glorified, a faith founded on the right teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Disciples and Apostles, the God-bearing fathers and all the saints, who have affirmed Christ's Orthodox Faith and have taught us to believe 'in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,—the Indivisible Trinity; through the intercession and prayers of our Queen, the Mother of God and Virgin Mary, through Her constant prayer to Her Son and our Lord, and through God's grace, the Lord has shown us the righteous and radiant Sun and opened up the earth, closed as Eden was, to reveal to us this most holy icon—an inexhaustible fount which, by His loving providence, was hidden in the earth, the miraculous icon of His Mother and our Queen, the Theotokos and Blessed Virgin Mary, Her glorious 'Hodegetria' and His

own loving image. And so, at a stones throw from that very same spot where His righteous anger at our sins was revealed, He showed us in the radiant rays of grace, the fount of healing,

The icon of the Mother of God revealed itself in the following manner: The Queen of Heaven did not disclose Her icon to the local hierarch, or to the towns authoritative head, nor to the lords, nor to the rich, nor to the wise starets, but revealed Her glorious treasure and inexhaustible fount for all those who came in faith—Her marvellous icon—to the young daughter of an ordinary warrior, skilled in battle a girl ten years of age named Matrona to whom this miraculous and most holy icon of the Mother of God appeared.

After the fire, that same year and month, the icon of the Blessed Virgin began to appear to this girl, commanding her to go into the town and tell the archbishop and the voivodes about the icon she had seen, so that they should come and bring forth the Blessed Virgins icon from the depths of the earth; she was also shown the spot where the holy treasure, the *pearl of great price*—the Mother of God's miraculous icon—would be found.

However, because of her youth and lack of sense, the girl was afraid to speak of her vision, and only told her mother about it, but her mother did not pay any heed to her words. After this the vision appeared several times again to the girl, showing her this holy and miraculous icon, and telling her that she must inform the authorities about it. The girl told her mother again and again about the appearance of this divine and miraculous icon and begged her to speak about it to the authorities.

And so the mother took the girl and hastened to the town to see the voivodes; she bade the girl tell them everything that had happened; the girl told them every word she had heard

from the beautiful, miraculous icon of the Mother of God, showing the spot where the icon would be found; but they, filled with doubt about the icon of the Most Pure Virgin as recounted by the girl, paid no heed. Then the girl's mother wept and took her to the archbishop, where she repeated her story showing the spot where the icon was, as revealed to the girl, in order that he might order this holy icon to be dug up, but the archbishop did not listen to her either but sent her away.

They had been to the voivodes and the archbishop at the seventh hour of the day, and the invention of the miraculous and holy icon of the Holy Virgin Mary took place after the fire, at the twelfth hour of this same day, the eighth of July, the Feast of St. Procopius the Great Martyr, in the same year. It happened thus: the mother, on her way home, told all the people she met about the miraculous icon that her daughter had seen, the people were amazed at her words but walked away without paying much attention to what she had said; so she took a spade and went to the place indicated, and began to dig but failed to find anything; after a while others also began digging. They dug up the entire area, but they found nothing. The girl then began to dig at a spot where a stove had once stood and others helped her, When they had dug up more than two cubits, the marvel occurred, the wondrous icon of our Queen, the Mother of God and Virgin Mary, Her holy 'Hodegetria', together with the Pre-Eternal Christ Child, appeared; this miraculous icon was covered with an old sleeve of cherry-red cloth; the icon itself shone wonderfully, as if it had just been painted and the dust of the earth had in no way affected this miraculous work, as we saw with our own eyes.

The girl lifted the image of the Most Pure Virgin with fear and trembling, and with joy and placed it upright on the spot. The people who were there began to cry out about the appearance of this divine icon; soon a great multitude of pious people



gathered, crying out with tears in their eyes: 'O Queen of Heaven, save us!' And they sent word to the archbishop and to the town authorities that a holy image of the Mother of God had been invented; the archbishop immediately ordered that the bell be rung and proceeded with all the assembly of the clergy hearing crosses, the voivodes and a multitude of people, to the place where the miraculous icon of the Most Holy Virgin had been invented.

He saw the icon shining wondrously like a new gift and was much amazed and struck with awe, for he had never seen an icon painted thus before. Overcome with joy and fear for his lack of faith, he prayed and wept, begging for mercy and forgiveness for his sin. The voivodes also wept and begged for mercy and forgiveness for their negligence and lack of faith which had caused them to sin before the Most Pure Virgins miraculous icon. And all the people of the town flocked to see this wondrous miracle of God, and, rejoicing with tears in their eyes, they glorified God and the Mother of God for the invention of this rich and priceless treasure.

I was then a priest of St. Nicholas Church, popularly known as *Gostinyi*, and although my heart was not easily moved, I too began to weep and prostrated myself before the image and miraculous icon of the Mother of God and the Pre-Eternal Christ Child. Then I knelt before the archbishop and asked his blessing and permission to take the miraculous icon; the archbishop blessed me and commanded me to take the icon. Unworthy as I am, I nonetheless touched the marvellous image in awe and joy and took it off the tree that had been stuck in the spot where the holy and miraculous icon had lain. At the archbishop's command I took the icon and went with it and the holy crosses to the nearby Church of St. Nicholas,

popularly known as 'of Tula'. After the singing of moleben, the archbishop took the newly-appeared, miraculous icon and went to the town, accompanied by the assembly of the clergy, town authorities, and a great multitude of the Orthodox people including women and children preceded by holy icons....

With God's grace and the help of the miraculous icon of the Most Holy Mother of God, we glorify and rejoice, hymning the Worker of wondrous miracles, God glorified in the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever and world without end, Amen.

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## About the Author



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Rev. Fr. K.L. Mathew Vaidyan is a talented orator, writer and a biblical scholar. He has good repute in the fields of Comfort Literature, Theological Training and social service activities. After his post-graduate studies in Serampore University and Russia, he rendered remarkable service as the Professor of Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam. At present, he is the Principal of St. Paul's Mission Training Centre, Mavelikara. Also, he is the Chief Editor of three church publications namely, Orthodox Youth, Powrasthya Tharam and Doothan. Earlier, he worked as the General Secretary of the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement of India, and St. Thomas Orthodox Clergy Association. He is an active member of the Orthodox Church Managing Committee, Planning Committee and Publication Committee. He served as the patron of the Ali Keraia Balajanasakhyam Mavelikara Union, vicar of a number of parishes in Kollam Diocese and Delhi Diocese. Being a resource person of religious conferences and a renowned convention speaker, he travels around the world preaching the word of God and proclaiming the Theology of Reconciliation. He is the author of seventeen books.

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