

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FORETASTE OF THE GLORY OF THE SAINTS IN THE MILITANT CHURCH

From the **moment** of their departure from this present life, the righteous **foretaste** the glory and honour of Perfection (**Theosis**) in **Heaven**, which they **shall receive** as their eternal and inalienable reward **following** the **Universal Resurrection** and **Judgement**. This **fact** is witnessed **to** by Holy Scripture and the Teaching of Holy Tradition. The Militant Church honours the **Martyrs** and **Saints** by **either** building temples **upon** their tombs **celebrating** their “*birthday*” (i.e. “*the day of their Martyrdom*”) or by naming churches in honour of them. The faithful **address** petitions to the Saints as being the true friends of God **Who**, through them and **their** Holy Relics, performs wonders and miracles in order to glorify them within His Church as they glorified Him **within** their lives. This honourable veneration is expressed through the honour shown to the **Holy Icons** and relics of Holy men and women of all ages, who proved **and manifested** in their lives the **Life of Christ**. This veneration is not a worship offered to gods because we Orthodox Christians worship only One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but is a veneration of honour to the direct friends of God.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. The Honour of the Saints

St Basil the Great observed that “...*it is honourable and by us...*” in this life and before the Universal Judgement and Resurrection that the Martyrs and the rest of the Saints “...*enjoy the engagement...*” of the glory **due** to them.<sup>2</sup> This honour offered **by the Church** to the **Saints** is distinguished from the worship offered only to God.<sup>3</sup>

In the Old Testament God instructed: “*You shall fear the Lord your God, and only Him shall You serve; and you shall cleave to Him, and by His name you shall swear*”<sup>4</sup> and “*I Am the Lord God: that is My name: I will not give My glory to another, nor my praise to graven images.*”<sup>5</sup> We worship only the Father our only true God as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ proclaimed when He was tempted by the devil in the desert.<sup>6</sup> This does not exclude the honourable veneration shown to the **Saints** because this “...*has the proof of the favour to the common Master...*” and by honouring “...*those who distinguished themselves in piety we glorify first the Master through the servants...*” in whom “...*God is admired through His Holy (men).*”

Because the **Saints** are God’s friends they have been honoured much by us.<sup>7</sup> For, he who does not honour the King’s friends does not honour the King. For, he who does not love the King’s friends does not love the King. “*Now to the King*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Plato of Moscow, *Orthodox Teaching*, pp. 182-183. Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Decree VIII*, in Link, *Apostolic Faith Today*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>2</sup> St. Basil the Great, *To Barlaam martyr*, Homily 17, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 484. Cf. Fragkopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp.227-230.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Confession*, quest. 4, p. 105. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp.358-362.

<sup>4</sup> Lev. 6:13; 10:20.

<sup>5</sup> Is. 42:8.

<sup>6</sup> Matth. 4:10.

<sup>7</sup> Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Confession*, quest. 4, 104.

*eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever*<sup>8</sup>. The **Saints** not only loved God but gave their entire **life and** existence to Him and became His eyes, ears, mouth, hands and feet presenting all their bodily members and soul to Him as Holy vessels and home in which the Holy Trinity dwells. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, assured us, saying: *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”*<sup>9</sup> The **Saints** became imitators of God as St Paul teaches us saying *“...therefore, be imitators of God as dear children.”*<sup>10</sup> Also our Lord assured us once again that *“...he who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”*<sup>11</sup> St Paul teaches us that *“...glory, honour, and peace to everyone who works what is good.”*<sup>12</sup> St John falls down on his knees before the Angel’s feet and reminds him, saying: *“See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!”*<sup>13</sup>

This teaching of the Holy Scriptures was clarified by the practice of the Orthodox Church from ancient times through the teachings and proclamations of the **Holy** Fathers and Scholars of our Church. Thus the *Martyrdom of St Polycarp*, one of the most ancient testimony saved to our times, assures us that the Christians of Smyrna gathered together *“...with joy and gladness ... to celebrate the birthday of his (St Ignatius) Martyrdom in commemoration of those who have already fought in the contest, and for the training and preparation of those who will do so in the future.”*<sup>14</sup>

St Cyprian testified that a similar practice was that of the Orthodox Church of Africa because the anniversary of the day of Martyrdom of those who became athletes for Christ was celebrated with festivities and with the celebration of the **Divine** Eucharist.<sup>15</sup>

St Gregory of Nyssa noted the practice of the Church before the time of St Gregory the Wonder-worker assuring us that the Christians gather together *“...during the annual period and rejoiced celebrating the honour of the Martyrs.”*<sup>16</sup>

The liturgical information of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century found in the *Apostolic Orders* included the instruction that the faithful *“...on the day of the Apostles...”* should not work, as well as *“...on the day of Stephen the first-Martyr and the rest of the Holy Martyrs who preferred Christ rather than their own lives...”* and to gather in the *“...cemeteries ... signing for those Martyrs who have fallen asleep and all the Saints from ages to age...”* offering *“...the antitype of the Kingdom, the Blood of Christ, the acceptable Eucharist.”*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Tim. 1:17.

<sup>9</sup> John 14:23.

<sup>10</sup> Ephes. 5:1.

<sup>11</sup> Matth. 10:40.

<sup>12</sup> Rom. 2:10.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. 19:10.

<sup>14</sup> *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 18, 3, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 142.

<sup>15</sup> St. Cyprian, *Epist.* 34, 3, in Migne, *P.L.*, 4, 331.

<sup>16</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To St. Gregory the wonder-worker*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 46, 953.

<sup>17</sup> *Apostolic Orders*, VIII, 33, §§ 8 and 9; VI, 30, § 2, in *B*, v. 2, pp. 165 and 116.

During the 4<sup>th</sup> century St Basil the Great gives us the information that “...*the old custom...*” of the **Bishops** of Pontus was to gather together “...*each year for the commemoration of the great Martyrs Eupsychius and Dama.*”<sup>18</sup>

St Gregory of Nyssa exalted the multitude of “...*all the cities and villages who gather in a Holy place...*” where the relics of the Martyr Theodorus were **treasured**. **He** manifested his joy seeing “...*the flock’s yard being overcrowded, although the paddock of the sheep is not small, but makes tight the spaciousness caused by the mass of the flock...*” and the Holy temple in which the festival took place.<sup>19</sup>

St Augustine observed that the Christians express their respect to the Martyrs during the day of their commemoration through religious festivities.<sup>20</sup>

From the above testimonies it is obvious that this honour towards the **Martyrs** and **Saints** was expressed on the one hand with the building of temples in their names and usually upon their tombs; whereas, on the other hand through the festive gathering during the anniversary of their “*birthday*” (day of departure from this life). **During** this day they were reading Holy Scripture and narrating the lives and achievements of the **Martyr** or **Saint** who pleased God and with festive psalms the ceremony ended with the **Divine** Eucharist.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. The Meaning of the Honour to the Saints

The **Saints are** honoured and this honour offered to them was clarified within written sources which expressed the belief of the entire Orthodox Church, in the homilies and writings of the **Holy** Fathers and Scholars and in the **Decrees of Canons** of the Holy Councils. In the ancient writings of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, “...*the Church of God which sojourns at Smyrna to the Church of God which sojourns in Philomelium...*”<sup>22</sup> is stressed “...*that we will never be able either to abandon the Christ who suffered for the salvation of the whole world of those who are saved, the blameless on behalf of sinners, or to worship anyone else. For this one, who is the Son of God, we worship, but the Martyrs we love as disciples and imitators of the Lord, as they deserve, on account of their matchless devotion to their own King and Teacher. May we also become their partners and fellow disciples?*”<sup>23</sup>

St Basil the Great characterised “...*the honour towards the Martyrs and their fellow servants...*” as “...*the proof of the favour towards the Master.*” Through the narration of the lives “...*of those who are distinguished in piety...*” he supported the opinion that “...*we glorify first the Master through the servants.*”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Epistle 252*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 940.

<sup>19</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To the martyr Theodorus*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 46, 736. *Ibid*, *To the holy forty Martyrs*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 46, 749.

<sup>20</sup> St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, XX, 21, in Migne, *P.L.*, 42, 384.

<sup>21</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To the martyr Theodorus*, Homily I, in Migne, *P.G.*, 46, 785. *Apostolic Orders*, VI, 30, § 2, in *B*, v. 2, pp. 165 and 116. St. Cyprian, *Epist.* 34, in Migne, *P.L.*, 4, 331-337.

<sup>22</sup> *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Introduction, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 135.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 17, 2-3, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 142.

<sup>24</sup> St. Basil the Great, *To the forty Martyrs*, Homily 19, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 508. *Ibid*, *To the martyr Gordius*, Homily 18, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 492.

St Augustine, referring to the ancient tradition that was practised before his time according to which Altars were raised upon the tombs of the Martyrs for their honour, observed that these Altars were built not to offer to the Martyrs our Sacrifices but only to the God of the Martyrs. Whatsoever we offer during their annual commemoration, we offer to God Who crowned them. We honour them through the common worship in love and respect as to Holy men of God. Continuing, St Augustine stressed that that which is called in Greek «λατρεία» (“worship”) we offer only to God and not to anyone else.<sup>25</sup>

St Hieronymus addressing Vigilant who condemned the honour to the Martyrs asked: “So, are we defiled when we enter into the royalty of the Apostles? Was the Emperor Constantine who brought to Constantinople the Holy relics of Andrew, Luke and Timothy sacrilegious?” “Who, O foolish head, offered honour of worship and venerated the Martyrs? Who considered God the man?”<sup>26</sup>

St John of Damascus expressing the opinion of all the Holy Fathers and Scholars concluded that we must honour “...the Saints as friends of Christ, as children and heirs of God.” According to the proclamation of the fourth Evangelist that whoever received Christ “...to them He gave the right to become children of God...”<sup>27</sup> and the assurance of the Saviour Who said “...you are My friends.”<sup>28</sup> In addition, he proclaimed that “...the Saints are gods and rulers and kings ... not by nature, but as they overruled the passions and kept unchanged the Divine image and as having been united to God according to their choice and having received as inhabitants within them the Grace, which He is by Nature. Should we then not honour the servants and friends and sons of God?” Determining furthermore the ways according to which it is proper to honour the Saints, he said: “Yes, we must honour, by building temples to God in their names, presenting offerings, glorifying their memories and enjoying spiritually, in psalms and hymns and spiritual odes. They are the living pillars and images becoming the imitators of the virtues”. Naming and counting those who must be honoured “...the Theotokos as mainly and truly the Mother of God, the prophet John as the Forerunner and Baptist, the Apostle and Martyr...” then the “...Apostles, prophets, shepherds and teachers, the Martyrs of the Lord and our Holy fathers, the god-bearing ascetics ... the prophets, patriarchs, just who were before and had foretold about the appearance of the Lord.”<sup>29</sup>

As the climax of the testimonies from Holy Tradition we present the 4<sup>th</sup> Act of the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council according to which “...we were taught to honour and glorify first and above the Theotokos, who is higher than all the heavenly powers, the Holy and angelical powers, the blessed and all-complimentary Apostles, the glorious prophets, and the victorious Martyrs who suffered for Christ and the Holy and god-bearing teachers and all the Holy men, and to ask for their interventions, as being able to familiarise us to God the King of all.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, XX, 21, in migne, P.L., 42, 384.

<sup>26</sup> St. Hieronymus, *Contra Vigilant*, § 5, in migne, P.L., 23, 358.

<sup>27</sup> John 1:12.

<sup>28</sup> John 15:14.

<sup>29</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the honour to the saints and their relics*, IV, 88, 15, in Migne, P.G., 94, 1164-1168.

<sup>30</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Act of the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council, in Harduin, *Acta conciliorum*, IV, p. 265. Mogilas, A, 40 and C, 52, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, pp. 613, 679, 770. Fytrakis, *Relics*, pp. 28-31, 35, 64-68, 78-81, 104-108.

### 3. The Invocation of the Mediation of the Saints

In the Old Testament concerning the invocation of the mediation of the Saints, God appeared urging Abimelech, king of Gerara, who was struck by illness because he took Sarah, forcing him to return her to Abraham “...for he is a prophet, and shall pray for you, and you shall live; but if you restore her not, know that you shall die and all yours”<sup>31</sup>. “And Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his women servants, and they bore children; the Lord had closed every womb in the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.”<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere God instructed Eliphaz the Thaanite and his two friends who sinned by having “...not said anything true before...” the Lord, to go to Job “...and he shall offer a burnt-offering for...” them. “And My servant Job shall pray for you, for I will only accept him: for but for his sake I would have destroyed you, for you have not spoken the truth against My servant Job...” and the Lord “...pardoned their sin for the sake of Job.”<sup>33</sup> In other cases we see Samuel being asked by the people of Israel not to cease “...crying to the Lord...” for them to “...save...” them “...out of the hands of the Philistines.” And “...Samuel cried to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord heard him.”<sup>34</sup>

In the New Testament St Paul beseeched the prayers and petitions of the Christians. Writing to the Thessalonians he noted “...brethren, pray for us.”<sup>35</sup> In another case writing from Rome to the Ephesians he beseeched the “...supplication of all the Saints...” to pray for him “...that utterance may be given to...” him.<sup>36</sup> The same request is repeated to the Colossians<sup>37</sup> “...helping together in prayer for...” him<sup>38</sup>. In the Epistle to the Romans, he urged the Christians saying: “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the Saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.”<sup>39</sup>

How are the Saints informed of our prayers and requests? Holy Scriptures speak repeatedly of the servants of God who are alive and through supernatural visions and revelations are informed about the hidden things in the depths of the heart of others, or about events which took place in distant lands. St Peter was informed about the secret agreement between Ananias and Sapphira who “...lied to the Holy Spirit and kept back part of the price of the land for...” themselves.<sup>40</sup> Elisaie received full knowledge of what happened to Giezi when he ran to Naiman and received in the ignorance of the prophet “...a talent of silver, and two changes of raiment...”<sup>41</sup> as well

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<sup>31</sup> Gen. 20:7.

<sup>32</sup> Gen. 20:17-18.

<sup>33</sup> Job 42:7, 8 and 9.

<sup>34</sup> I Samuel (I Kings):7:8, 9.

<sup>35</sup> 1 Thess. 5:25.

<sup>36</sup> Ephes. 6:18, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Col. 4:3.

<sup>38</sup> 2 Corinth. 1:11.

<sup>39</sup> Rom. 15:30-32.

<sup>40</sup> Act 5:3.

<sup>41</sup> 2 Kings (4 Kings) 5:20-27.

as about the secret plans of the king of Syria, which he “...announced to the king of Israel.”<sup>42</sup>

In addition Holy Scripture assures us that the Charisma of foreseeing was given to the servants of God. Jacob “...having looked up, he saw the host of God encamped; and the angels of God met him.”<sup>43</sup> Many Holy men were caught up in an inconceivable, spiritual way out of their bodies or were found within their bodies in direct communication with the heavenly places.<sup>44</sup> Thus the Prophet Isaiah saw “...the Lord sitting on a high and exalted throne...” surrounded by Seraphim crying out and saying “...Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.”<sup>45</sup> Ezekiel stood before “...the glory of the Lord...” and fell on his knees before the “...throne...” and the Cherubs stood on the right side.<sup>46</sup> In the New Testament St Paul was caught up to the third Heaven where he heard “...inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”<sup>47</sup> Also St John the Apostle and Evangelist became “...in the Spirit...”<sup>48</sup> and saw “...the four living creatures...”<sup>49</sup> and “...the twenty-four elders...”<sup>50</sup> “...each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the Saints.” When the Lamb “...had taken the scroll...”<sup>51</sup> which was “...written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals...”<sup>52</sup> and had received revelations about “...the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.”<sup>53</sup>

From the above the faithful Orthodox Christian is informed by the All-wise and Almighty God Who is All-present and knows all. God is rich in His Ways through which He reveals to His servants those things which are far from them and the things which are or will take place in this world.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4. Holy Tradition on the Mediation of the Saints

Regarding the teachings on the intervention of the Saints in the Tradition of the Orthodox Church,<sup>55</sup> it is worthy to recall the advice of Origen to his friend Ambrosius. He urges Ambrosius, who was facing Martyrdom, to overcome his hesitation concerning his children and advises that he will be more beneficial to them “...after his departure...” rather than “...if he remained with them...” because “...then and more officially he will love them and will be closer praying for them.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> 2 Kings (4 Kings) 6:11-13.

<sup>43</sup> Gen. 32:1.

<sup>44</sup> 2 Corinth. 12:1-5.

<sup>45</sup> Is. 6:1-3.

<sup>46</sup> Ez. 2:2:1-8; 10:1.

<sup>47</sup> 2 Corinth. 12:4.

<sup>48</sup> Rev. 1:10; 4:2.

<sup>49</sup> Rev. 4:6, 8, 9; 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 6:1, 3, 5, 7; 7:11; 15:7; 19:4.

<sup>50</sup> Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:8, 11, 14; 6:1; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4.

<sup>51</sup> Rev. 5:8.

<sup>52</sup> Rev. 5:1.

<sup>53</sup> Rev. 1:19.

<sup>54</sup> Kritopoulos, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 548.

<sup>55</sup> Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Confession*, ch. 8, p. 32. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 362-365.

<sup>56</sup> Origen, *To Martyrdom*, 38, in *B*, v. 9, p. 59.

Eusebius referred to the Martyr Potamiaenis who promised to the soldier Basilides that when she departs from this world she will **intercede** on his behalf to “...her Lord...” **Who** will reward her. Basilides after a short time **also** faced Martyrdom. Three days after his arrest, **Potamiaenis** appeared to him and crowning him said that she **interceded to** “...the Lord for him...” and her prayers were heard. Basilides **shortly thereafter** received the crown of Martyrdom.<sup>57</sup>

St Ambrosius proclaimed that the Martyrs can pray for our sins, whose own sins have been washed with blood. They are our protectors, the overseers of our lives and deeds, whom we are not ashamed to acknowledge as our intercessors.<sup>58</sup>

St Basil the Great proclaimed that “...I accept the Holy Apostles, prophets and Martyrs, and I call upon their intervention, for through their intervention, the philanthropic God becomes merciful to me and a ransom for my infirmities.”<sup>59</sup> In addition, in his homily to the forty Martyrs he **addressed** them as “...common servants, protectors of mankind, mighty ambassadors, co-workers of prayer.”<sup>60</sup>

Similar opinion is expressed by his brother St Gregory of Nyssa in his homily to the **Martyr** Theodorus whom he calls to come “...to those who honour him as an invisible friend...” and “...to intercede for the country to the common King ..., as a soldier...” to defend against “...the enemies...” and “...as a **Martyr to grant favour to the fellow servants.**” If **there** was necessity for more intervention, to gather “...the choir of his brethren **Martyrs** and with all...” to pray and to remind of “...Peter and Paul and John the Theologian and beloved disciple.”<sup>61</sup>

St Gregory of Nazianzus **called** upon the Hieromartyr St Cyprian to “...oversee from above with mercy and this Holy flock and to govern together for the better and to chase away the wolves and for the brightness of the Holy Trinity to grant more perfect and illustrious...” to him and his flock.<sup>62</sup>

St John Chrysostom **urged** the faithful to “...come to the prayers of the Saints and to ask...” them “...to pray for us.” He supports his opinion on the fact that the Saints have favour before God. “For the Martyrs were not slaughtered for us. Yet, we run for their honour. If we run together with those who were slaughtered for Christ’s sake, what will He do in return?”<sup>63</sup> Explaining the reason why we receive blessings from the relics of **Saints** he observed “...as the soldiers show their wounds, which they received in battle, to the king and they speak to him, likewise these who were beheaded ... whatever they ask from the heavenly King they will receive.”<sup>64</sup>

St Hieronymus concerning the honour and intervention of the **Saints** and **Martyrs**, **supported** the argument that, if when they were alive they had the need to

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<sup>57</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, VI, 5, 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 20, 553.

<sup>58</sup> St. Ambrosius, *De viduis*, c. 9, § 55, in Migne, *P.L.*, 16, 264.

<sup>59</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Epistle* 360, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 1100.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, *To the forty Martyrs*, § 8, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 521 and 524.

<sup>61</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To the martyr Theodorus*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 46, 745-748.

<sup>62</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *To the hieromartyr Cyprian*, Homily 24, § 19, in Migne, *P.G.*, 35, 1193.

<sup>63</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *To Genesis*, Homily 44, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 54, 408.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, *To the martyr Julianus*, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 50, 576.

pray for themselves and they could also pray for others, how much more could they do this after they have received the crowns, the victories and the triumphs?<sup>65</sup>

## 5. The Honour to the Holy Relics of the Saints

The honour towards the **Martyrs** and **Saints** was expressed especially in the honour towards their relics<sup>66</sup> and in whatever items or clothes they had used. Thus it is mentioned in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* that this Holy man removed his clothes the last moment, when he was ready to be received by the fire, so “...when the pyre was prepared, he took off all his clothes and removed his belt; he also tried to take off his shoes, though not previously in the habit of doing this, because all the faithful were always eager to be the first to touch his flesh. For he had been treated with all honour on account of his Holy life even before his grey hair appeared.”<sup>67</sup> When the precious body of the Hieromartyr was burnt, the faithful “...took up his bones, which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and deposited them in a suitable place...” in order to gather “...together, as we are able, with joy and gladness, the Lord will permit us to celebrate the birthday of his Martyrdom in commemoration of those who have already fought in the contest, and for the training and preparation of those who will do so in the future.”<sup>68</sup>

The fact that the Church offered liturgical honour to the relics of the Saints was not a discrimination of the faithful between **Saints** and non-**Saints**, but the **belief** of the ancient Orthodox Church was **that Christ** manifested **Himself** in the **Martyr** in a special way and through him He was revealing His power and victory over death.<sup>69</sup> The relics of the **Martyr** are a testimony for the Church, a proof of Christ’s final **Victory**.<sup>70</sup>

St Ignatius the Theophorus of Antioch when he was thrown to the wild beasts said “...only the largest parts of his Holy relics were gathered, which were carried and placed in Antioch in a linen cloth as a priceless treasure.”

St John Chrysostom **stressed that** these Holy relics were received by the Antiochians “...with crowns...” not only by them alone “...but by all the cities from Rome...” to Antioch they **were** “...accompanied praising the victor, glorifying the athlete, mocking the devil.”<sup>71</sup>

Eusebius **informed** us that the throne of St James, the Adelphotheos (= the Brother of God), was well preserved by his successors, proving in this way “*what respect they have for the Holy men who loved God*”<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> St. Hieronymus, *Contra Vigilant*, § 6, in Migne, *P.L.*, 23, 359.

<sup>66</sup> Bryennios, *Paralipomena*, ch. XI, p. 80.

<sup>67</sup> *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 13, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 140.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 18, 2-3, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 142.

<sup>69</sup> Schmemmann, *The Church Praying*, p. 234. Cf. Grabar, *Martyrium*, I, p. 29.

<sup>70</sup> Schmemmann, *The Church Praying*, p. 234.

<sup>71</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *To the Theophorus Ignatius*, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 50, 594.

<sup>72</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, VII, 19, in Migne, 20, 681.

St Ambrosius testified that the Christians collected with piety the instruments of Martyrdom as they were still stained with the blood of the Holy **Martyrs**.<sup>73</sup>

These testimonies should be considered natural expressions of the members of the Orthodox Church since they are based upon Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition. The *Apostolic Orders* do not consider the relics of those who have fallen asleep in God as dishonourable.<sup>74</sup> **In the Old Testament** when the prophet Elisha died, his relics raised the dead man. “*And it came to pass as they were burying a man, that behold, they saw a band of men, and they cast the man into the grave of Elisha: and as soon as he touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood up on his feet.*”<sup>75</sup>

St Cyril of Jerusalem explained that the above example occurred “...not only to honour the souls of the just...” but **also** their bodies. “*In the bodies of the just there is power...*” since “...the dead body of the prophet became a work of life and gave life to that which had died, that itself remained among the dead.”<sup>76</sup>

The *Apostolic Orders* proceeded furthermore by using another biblical example. Besides the Law of Moses concerning carcasses, which made the Jews unclean if they were to touch them,<sup>77</sup> the relics of the just in the Old Testament were never considered unclean. “*Moses was carrying the relics of Joseph*<sup>78</sup>, but never considered this as a miasma.”<sup>79</sup>

St Basil the Great added “...when they died judaically, the corpses were considered abominations; but, when death was for Christ their relics were Holy.” In the Mosaic Law was written that, if anyone touched a dead body he will “...be unclean till evening...” and “...shall wash his garments.”<sup>80</sup> “Now he who touches the bones of a Martyr receives some kind of sanctification from the body, which resides Divine Grace.”<sup>81</sup>

St Cyril of Jerusalem explained that the Grace which emanates from the relics of the **Saints** “...is some kind of power residing in the bodies of the **Saints** because it rested in the just soul for so many years, of which it became servant.”<sup>82</sup> This reminds us of St Paul’s words “...our bodies are members of Christ...”<sup>83</sup> and “...temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in us.”<sup>84</sup> St Cyril also referred to the events that even “...the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some...”<sup>85</sup> and healed them.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> St. Ambrosius, *Exhort. Virginit.*, c. 2, § 9, in Migne, *P.L.*, 16, 354.

<sup>74</sup> *Apostolic Orders*, VI, 30, 5, in **B**, v. 2, p. 116.

<sup>75</sup> 2 Kings (4 Kings) 13:21.

<sup>76</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 18, § 16, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1036-1037.

<sup>77</sup> Lev. 11:39-40

<sup>78</sup> Ex. 13:19.

<sup>79</sup> *Apostolic Orders*, VI, 30, 5, in **B**, v. 2, p. 116.

<sup>80</sup> Lev. 11:39, 40.

<sup>81</sup> St. Basil the Great, *To Psalm 115(116)*, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 30, 112.

<sup>82</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 18, § 16, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1036-1037.

<sup>83</sup> 1 Corinth. 6:15.

<sup>84</sup> 1 Corinth. 6:19.

<sup>85</sup> Acts 5:15.

<sup>86</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 18, § 16, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1036-1037.

St John Chrysostom, reminding us about the narration of the Prophet Elisha, observed that not only the bodies “...but the relics of the *Saints* are full of Grace.” Because if, before the Holy Spirit dwelt within the Church of Christ, during the period of the Old Testament at the time of the prophet Elisaie, “...this happened and his case was touched by the dead and the bonds of death were loosened and he returned back from the dead, how much more now, when we have greater Grace, when the action of the Spirit is much more...” will the faithful stretch his hand to touch the case which contains the Holy relics and “...will receive from it much power.”<sup>87</sup>

This power of Grace, which emanates from the tombs of the Holy Martyrs and Saints, is confirmed by the multitude of miracles, which take place when one approaches with faith and piety. About these miracles we have the testimonies of St Ambrosius,<sup>88</sup> St Augustine,<sup>89</sup> St John Chrysostom<sup>90</sup> and the Cappadocian Fathers (St Basil, the Great,<sup>91</sup> St Gregory of Nyssa<sup>92</sup> and St Gregory of Nazianzus the Theologian<sup>93</sup>).

Kritopoulos spoke of the honour which the Orthodox Church offers to the Holy relics explaining the reason for the outpouring of the Divine Grace as follows: “Because the pagans ... considered as painful and blasphemous to die for Christ, God ... wanting to prove it as honourable and glorious this thrice-blessed death, which was for the sake of His only Begotten Son, placed in the relics of those who died the Grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit ... That it is truly the Grace of the Holy Spirit which was added to the Holy relics, is testified to by the numerous scholars of the ancient Church, and wise men and Saints, the miracles which were performed through the Holy relics, as the expelling of demons and the healing of many illnesses.”<sup>94</sup>

## 6. The Honouring Veneration of the Holy Icons

Concerning the honouring veneration of the Holy Icons,<sup>95</sup> St Basil the Great in his confession to Julian observed that “...the characters of the Saints’ Icons I honour, which is not forbidden by the Holy Apostles, but in all our churches they are painted...” and the prohibitions in the Old Testament are not absolute. In the second commandment of the Ten Commandments we are instructed: “You shall not make to yourself an idol, nor likeness of anything, whatever things are in the heaven above, and whatever are in the earth beneath, and whatever are in the waters under the earth.”<sup>96</sup> But, the same Lord and God instructed Moses to make images of Cherubs

<sup>87</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Praise to Ignatius the Theophorus*, § 5, in Migne, P.G., 50, 595.

<sup>88</sup> St. Ambrosius, *Epist.* 22, § 9, in Migne, P.L., 16, 1064.

<sup>89</sup> St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XXII, § 2, in Migne, P.L., 41, 701.

<sup>90</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *To the martyrs*, in Migne, P.G., 50, 664. Ibid, *To the Egyptian martyrs*, § 1, in Migne, P.G., 50, 694-695. Ibid, *To 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians*, Homily 26, § 5, in Migne, P.G., 61, 583.

<sup>91</sup> St. Basil the Great, *To Psalm 115(116)*, § 4, in Migne, P.G., 30, 112. Ibid, *To the martyr Juliet*, § 2, in Migne, P.G., 31, 241.

<sup>92</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To the forty Martyrs*, Homily 1, in Migne, P.G., 46, 784.

<sup>93</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *To hieromartyr Cyprian*, Homily 24, § 18, in Migne, P.G., 35, 1192. Ibid, *Against Julian I*, Homily 4, § 69, in Migne, P.G., 589.

<sup>94</sup> Kritopoulos, ch. XVI, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 547.

<sup>95</sup> Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Confession*, quest. 4, pp. 104-105, 106.

<sup>96</sup> Ex. 20:4.

saying: “*And you shall make two cherubs graven in gold, and you shall put them on both sides of the propitiatory. They shall be made, one cherub on this side, and another cherub on the other side of the propitiatory; and you shall make the two cherubs on the two sides. The cherubs shall stretch forth their wings above, overshadowing the propitiatory with their wings; and their faces shall be toward each other, the faces of the cherubs shall be toward the propitiatory. And you shall set the propitiatory on the ark above, and which I shall give you. And I will make Myself known to you from thence, and I will speak to you above the propitiatory between the two cherubs, which are upon the ark of testimony, even in all things which I shall charge you concerning the children of Israel.*”<sup>97</sup> Elsewhere God instructed Moses to “*...make a serpent, and put it on a signal-staff; and it shall come to pass that whenever a serpent shall bite a man, every one so bitten that looks upon it shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a signal-staff: and it came to pass that whenever a serpent bit a man, and he looked on the brazen serpent, he lived.*”<sup>98</sup> The king and prophet Solomon, when he made the “*Sea*” or the “*basin*”, he made “*...twelve oxen under the sea...*”<sup>99</sup> and “*...between the projections were lions, and oxen, and cherubs.*”<sup>100</sup> But, these images of the Cherubs were not to be worshipped, but mainly to remind the Israelites, that this place is Holy and that you who enter in should be Holy.

This prohibition was not renewed in the New Testament by the Law-giver, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for as He renewed and fulfilled<sup>101</sup> the Law of the Old, He Himself gave the new Law of the New Covenant speaking with authority and saying: “*You have heard that it was said to those of old ... But I say to you...*”<sup>102</sup>

From the first centuries of Christianity in the Catacombs, the Christians used to draw designs either of events or persons with symbolic meaning such as the anchor, lamb, pigeon, fish, etc., with allegoric meaning relating to the parables of Christ (the Vine, the Good Shepherd, the Harp Player, etc.), from Scriptures (Noah in the Ark, the resurrection of Lazarus, Daniel, Jonah, the Three Children in the fire, Moses striking the rock, etc.) or of the Lord, the Theotokos and the Saints which are from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century and the oldest from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Tertullian spoke of representations of the Good Shepherd on cups.<sup>103</sup>

Eusebius refers to a brazen statue representing the Lord which the Canaanite made for the healing of her daughter<sup>104</sup> by the Lord, as well as “*...Icons of the apostles Paul and Peter and of Christ made with colours and preserved in Icons...*” which he assures us that he saw with his own eyes.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ex. 25:18-22.

<sup>98</sup> Num. 21:8-9.

<sup>99</sup> 2 Kings (3 Kings) 7:25.

<sup>100</sup> 2 Kings (3 Kings) 7:29.

<sup>101</sup> Matth. 5:17.

<sup>102</sup> Matth. 5:21-22; 27-28; 31-32; 33-34; 38-39; 43-44.

<sup>103</sup> Tertullian, *De pudicitia*, 7, 10, in Migne, *P.L.*, 2, 1038. Cf. Trempelas, *Dogmatique*, v. III, p. 404.

<sup>104</sup> Matth. 15:21-28. Mark 7:24-30.

<sup>105</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, VII, 18, in Migne, *P.G.*, 20, 680.

St Gregory of Nyssa informs us of how rapidly the use of Holy Icons was spread during the 4<sup>th</sup> century. He stressed the benefits which one receives by seeing the Holy Icons because they teach the Christian “...as in books through colours narrating the struggles of the Martyr ... For the writings (books) know to remain silent, but on the walls (the Icons) to speak and to benefit the greatest.”<sup>106</sup>

St John Chrysostom spoke of the sign of the Holy Cross and informed us that “...everyone continuously signs themselves with the sign of the Cross on their members...,” that is on the forehead and “...everywhere one can see (the sign of the Cross), in the homes, in the market, in the deserts, in the roads, in the mountains, in the sea and ships and islands, in the beds, in the clothes, in the arms, in silver vessels, in the walls, everywhere being shined and spread.”<sup>107</sup>

Asterius of Amasia praising Saint Euphemia described the Holy Icons which decorated the praying house of the Saint.<sup>108</sup>

St Basil the Great in his speech to the Martyr Barlaam, called upon the “...luminous painters...” to “...magnify ... the achievements of the Holy Martyrs...” with their skills and colours making the Icon of the commander general and Martyr. Elsewhere, he spoke of the sameness of the Essence of the Holy Trinity and the equality of the Son to the Father and described prophetically the reason upon which the veneration of the Icons is based observing that “...royal is caledl and the Icon of the king. For neither the state nor its glory divided. For, as the authority and the power is one, likewise and the glory is one and not many; because the honour of the Icon goes to the prototype.”<sup>109</sup>

St Gregory of Nazianzus emphasised the beneficial effect which the vision of Holy Icons have on those who watch them.<sup>110</sup>

Prudentius described the Icons, which showed the Martyrdom of St Cassian, as well as the Martyrdom of St Hippolytus.<sup>111</sup>

St Hieronymus spoke of the Icons of the Holy Apostles and that they were painted on vessels.<sup>112</sup>

St Augustine mentioned that during his time it was a custom in many places to represent in Icons St Peter and St Paul next to our Lord.<sup>113</sup>

In the Church History intense struggles were known in the Orthodox Church against the blasphemous Iconoclasts (the breakers of Icons) concerning the correct veneration of the Holy Icons. The end to this period was given by the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical

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<sup>106</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To the martyr Theodorus*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 46, 737.

<sup>107</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Proof to Jews and Greeks, that Christ is God*, § 9, in Migne, *P.G.*, 48, 826.

<sup>108</sup> Asterius of Amasia, *Praise to saint Euphemia*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 40, 333-337.

<sup>109</sup> St. Basil the Great, *To the martyr Barlaam*, Homily 17, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 484. Ibid, *About the Holy Spirit*, ch. XVIII, § 45, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 149.

<sup>110</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, in Migne, *P.G.*, 37, 737.

<sup>111</sup> Prudentius, *Peristephanon hymn*, IX, 7; and hymn XI, in migne, *P.L.*, 60, 433-435 and 544. Ibid, *Poema XXVII and XXVIII*, in migne, *P.L.*, 61, 660 and 663.

<sup>112</sup> St. Hieronymus, *In Jon.*, IV, 6, in migne, *P.L.*, 25, 1148.

<sup>113</sup> St. Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum*, I, c. X, in migne, *P.L.*, 34, 1049.

Synod which took place in Nicene of Bithynia (787), which proclaimed, that with the sign of the precious and life-giving Cross to have the precious and Holy Icons, which with colours and mosaic and other matter are made with skill in the Churches of God, on the Holy items and vestments, walls and boards, houses and roads. The Holy Synod declared that “...the Icon of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ and of the blessed Theotokos, noble angels, and all the Saints and Holy men.” Explaining the benefit which one receives from the vision and honour of the Holy Icons the Holy Synod added that “...as much as one looks at the painted representations, even more those who watch recall and desire the memory of the prototypes.” Determining the boundaries in which one should move concerning the honour to the Holy Icons, it concludes that we must “...kiss and venerate...,” not offering true worship, which is only given to the Divine Nature, but in the same manner to the sign of the precious and Life-giving Cross and the Holy Gospels and the rest of the Holy items. “For, the honour of the Icon passes to the prototype and he who venerates the Icon venerates the hypostasy of him who is described.”<sup>114</sup>

The defender of the Holy Icons is considered to be St John of Damascus<sup>115</sup> who expressed his opinions in the following arguments:

1. Without ignoring the Invisibility and absolute Immateriality of God, he emphasised that “...if to depict the soul is helpless how much more God Who gave to the soul the immaterial?” He proclaimed that “...I depict God Who is invisible not as invisible, but as having become visible for us, partaking of flesh and blood; I do not depict the invisible Deity, but I depict the flesh of God which was seen.”<sup>116</sup>
2. But the question: “Is it allowed to make and use these Icons?” Many opposed the making and the use according to the prohibitions of the Old Testament. But these prohibitions were not absolute because in the Old Testament, according to the instruction of God, images were made by the “...work of man’s hands and in the likeness of Cherubim. How then can you forbid by law, those which the law commands to make? If for the law you forbid the Icons, forbid also the Sabbath and circumcision, but know, if you keep the Law, Christ has benefitted us nothing.” Strengthening his argument with another argument, this Holy Father added: “The ancient Israel did see God, we see the glory of the Lord with an uncovered face.” And for the Jews “...because of the danger of falling into idolatry, the Law was given...” forbidding the making of images. “We (the Orthodox), to whom was given to flee the error of superstition, were made clear with God, knowing the truth and worshipping only God and being enriched in the true knowledge of God and becoming perfect and passing by the infancy, we are no longer under a supervisor, having received the distinctive habit from God and knowing what is that which is depicted and what is indescribable in an Icon.”<sup>117</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Mansi, XIII, p. 380. Karmeris, *Τα Δογματικά*, v. I, pp. 203-204.

<sup>115</sup> Trempelas, *Encyclopaedia*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>116</sup> St. John of Damascus, *1<sup>st</sup> Apologeticus to those who slander the holy icons*, Homily I, §§ 14, 16, in Migne, P.G., 94, 1236. Ibid, *3<sup>rd</sup> Apologeticus to those who slander the holy icons Homily*, Homily III, § 25, in Migne, P.G., 94, 1345.

<sup>117</sup> St. John of Damascus, *1<sup>st</sup> Apologeticus to those who slander the holy icons*, Homily I, § 16, in Migne, P.G., 94, 1248. Ibid, *3<sup>rd</sup> Apologeticus to those who slander the holy icons Homily III*, § 8, in

3. The veneration of Holy Icons is taught by the Tradition of the Orthodox Church. *“Do not make new laws...”* neither *“...move the eternal boundaries, which your fathers have placed. For they did not deliver the ecclesiastic law only in writings, but in some unwritten tradition.”*<sup>118</sup>
  
4. The Icons of God are everywhere. First in the Holy Trinity, the Son is *“...the natural and unchangeable living image of the invisible God.”* *“They are images and examples in God of what He is, that is His eternal Will. These images and examples were called by Dionysius predestinations. For in His Will, all were characterised by Him predestined and which will take place before their birth, as if someone wanted to build a house but first he designs the **plan** in his mind.”* In the visible creation *“...the visible **things** are the **images** of the invisible and **shapeless**...”* and *“...since **the** creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen.”*<sup>119</sup> *For we see images in Creation **that dimly** declare to us the Divine manifestations.”* All the Old Testament is a type and image of the New Testament.<sup>120</sup>

St John of Damascus proved that the use of Holy Icons is **permissible**. He then proceeded to clarify the problem **between the use of the terms “worship” (of God) and “veneration” (of Holy Icons.)** He **confronted** the argument **that the veneration of Holy Icons is an act of respect towards the prototype depicted on matter.** Whereas worship belongs to God alone. He stressed that: *“... I do not worship the matter, I worship the Creator of matter Who became for me matter and in matter dwelt and through matter worked my Salvation.”* Truly the Son of God, when He was Incarnated took up a material body, which is the Body of God *“...because of the hypostatic union.”* However, it remained *“...what it was by nature, flesh with a living logical and **intellectual** soul, not uncreated.”* *“I respect this matter and proceed with decency, because through this my Salvation took place, as the Divine Act and full of Grace.”* **Is it not relevant that** *“...the wood of the Cross is glorious and blessed? Or does the place of Golgotha and the Holy Tomb, which is the fountain of our resurrection not **important**? Or is it not the Life-giving Table, which gives us the Bread of Life? Or is **the Body and Blood of our Lord** not matter, which is above all these?”* He concluded that **we must** *“... not blame the matter, for it is not dishonourable. For nothing **that** God has made is dishonourable.”*<sup>121</sup>

St John determining the nature of the veneration of Holy Icons distinguished the different types of worship and veneration. First, he determined and numbered the ways of worship and veneration, which are *“...the only proper ways for **us to worship** the nature of God.”* Then he **clarified the veneration (respect) which is showed** to the *“...creatures, through and in which God worked our Salvation...”* **such** as *“...the*

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Migne, P.G., 94, 1328. Ibid, *1<sup>st</sup> Apologeticus to those who slander the holy icons*, Homily I, §§ 6-8, .in Migne, P.G., 94, 1248. Ibid, *2<sup>nd</sup> Apologeticus to those who slander the holy icons*, Homily II, §§ 7, 8, in Migne, P.G., 94, 1284.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, *1<sup>st</sup> Apologeticus to those who slander the holy icons*, Homily I, § 23. Ibid, *2<sup>nd</sup> Apologeticus to those who slander the holy icons*, Homily II, § 16, in Migne, P.G., 94, 1257.

<sup>119</sup> Rom. 1:20.

<sup>120</sup> St. John of Damascus, *1<sup>st</sup> Apologeticus to those who slander the holy icons*, Homily I, §§ 9-13 and Homily III, § 18-23, in Migne, P.G., 94, 1240.

<sup>121</sup> St. John of Damascus, *1<sup>st</sup> Apologeticus to those who slander the holy icons*, Homily I, § 16 and Homily II, §§ 13 and 14, in Migne, P.G., 94, 1245.

mountain of Sinai, the manger, the cave, Golgotha, the wood of the Cross, etc.” Furthermore he continued to emphasise that “...all the Holy temples of God and everything which God is called upon *are venerated*, not because of their nature, but *because* they are vessels of the Divine Actions.” However, “...I respect and venerate Angels, men and all matter which are *partakers* of Divine Action.” Nevertheless “...we must worship nothing as God, but rather only Him Who is by Nature God and we are obliged to offer Him all worship and honour.” Consequently, we offer honouring veneration to Holy Icons and generally to all Sanctified persons or things as “...the veneration and worship...” is strictly reserved for God. “The veneration of worship...” belongs only to God and is “...that which is presented out of respect and honour.” “We venerate the Icons, not offering veneration to the matter, but through them *to* those who are depicted on them. For the honour of Icon goes to the prototype, as St Basil said.”<sup>122</sup>

The Holy Father proceeded further to explain the benefits that we receive from Holy Icons. At first, he emphasised that “...the Icon is a reminder and what the letters of the books are for those who are initiated, the Icon is for the illiterate; what the word is to hearing, the Icon is for the sight.” “For this reason God commanded the making of the Ark out of wood that does not decay and the placing therein of the tablets and the rod and the golden pot which contained manna as a reminder of the events and the prototypes of the future.” “For the Icons were placed as reminders, not as gods, but as reminders of Divine Actions.” “How then should we not depict the saving sufferings of Christ our God, so that when my son asks me to explain, I shall say, that God the Word became Man and through Him all nature was restored to its first blessedness.” In addition, we depict the achievements of “...those who followed in the footsteps of the Lord...” so as “...to be anointed with zeal by imitating them.” Their examples are represented with skill and colours and being seen with our eyes, they stimulate the desire in us to imitate them. Holy Icons are vessels and channels of Divine Grace for the faithful.<sup>123</sup>

## 7. The Iconoclast Crisis<sup>124</sup>

The Iconoclast controversy divided the Byzantine Church for over a hundred years (726-843) into two bitterly irreconcilable factions that provoked a great deal of violence and persecution, generated much political and social unrest in Byzantine society and proved to be one of the major turning-points in the history of the Eastern Church. It was a complicated phenomenon, of which some essential features continue to elude the historian. Its origin is not entirely clear. The degree to which non-religious factors affected its course and outcome remains controversial. Furthermore, our understanding of the Doctrinal background of the dispute is impaired by the fact that on two separate occasions, which followed the temporary restoration of the veneration of images in 787 and its definitive re-establishment in 843, the writings of the Iconoclasts suffered wholesale destruction. Therefore we are dependent upon the biased evidence of their opponents. However, modern scholarship has succeeded to a

<sup>122</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Homily III*, §§ 33-36, 40. Ibid, *Homily I*, §§ 8, 14, 16 and 21; *Homily II*, § 11; in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1352 and 1356.

<sup>123</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Homily I*, §§ 17, 18 and 21, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1248, 1249, 1252, 1264. Ibid, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV, § 16, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 1172.

<sup>124</sup> Knowles, *The Middle ages*, pp. 86-94. Cf. Meyendorff, *Theology*, pp. 42-52.

large extent in overcoming these difficulties **and it** is now possible to draw a reasonably full and objective picture of this controversy.

Yet it is not easy, nor always possible, to disentangle its many interwoven strands. Certainly it had a social and economic aspect **that** appears particularly clear during the second phase of Iconoclasm (815-42) but can also be detected in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The Iconoclast faction derived its strength from the imperial authority of the Byzantine Emperor, from small craftsmen, and especially from the army, inspired by fervent loyalty to the leadership and later to the memory of its great military commander, the Iconoclast Emperor Constantine V. The Constantinople proletariat seemed **primarily** to have remained faithful to the veneration of Icons. Iconoclasm has also been described as a predominantly anti-monastic movement but this statement requires **clarification**.

It is true that during the first phase of Iconoclasm, the Monks were firmly loyal to the Icons and that in the latter part of Constantine V's reign many of them became Martyrs and Confessors. After the revival of Iconoclasm in 815 the **defenders** of Icons were led and inspired by the Abbot Theodore and his Monks of the Monastery of Studites in Constantinople. No evidence exists of anti-monastic measures by the Iconoclasts before the sixties of the 8<sup>th</sup> century; and after 815 **an** appreciable number of Monasteries sided with the Iconoclasts. We may further detect attempts of Iconoclastic Emperors to enforce their theological views upon their subjects. **There was** a resurgence of the Byzantine political philosophy **that** sought to subject the Church to the Imperial power and which was later decisively checked by the final defeat of Iconoclasm. It was this mentality that prompted Leo III to state in a letter to Pope Gregory II: "*I am Emperor and Priest,*" and Leo V to declare to his Bishops in 814: "*I too am a son of the Church and as a mediator, I shall listen to both parties and after a comparison of the two I shall determine the truth.*"

**The importance of these problems in** the context of the Iconoclast controversy **is evident from the** central issues of Doctrine. The dispute was about the nature of Christian worship, **both** individual and corporate. Iconoclasm derived its original basic **beliefs** from the hostility towards all forms of religious art.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, this hostility was widespread **throughout** Asia Minor, where it was probably fanned by the prevailing Muslim aversion to the representation of the human form. There is no doubt that Leo III was influenced by the views of the Bishops of that region. The tradition of hostility to religious art went back even further in time. The **use** of Holy **Icons** mainly representing Christ or the Saints, **was** first attested to in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and **became** widespread by the late 6<sup>th</sup> century. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century there was general popular devotion towards Holy Icons. The nature of this practice often caused its votaries to ignore the distinction between the image and the imagined and thus to cross the thin boundary between genuine veneration and superstitious idolatry. The understandable distrust felt by many educated Byzantine churchmen found support in the Patristic Tradition, notably in the letter of Eusebius of Caesarea to the Empress Constantia Augusta, in which the author, in accordance with Origenist ideas, denied the theological validity of any pictorial image of Christ. The Iconoclast position, which at first **was much** due to a fear of pagan idolatry, was later reinforced by Christological arguments put forward by Constantine V. He **believed**

that the true image is consubstantial with its prototype, and that Icons of Christ are heretical, for they either separate or else confuse His two Natures.

The Iconodules (defenders of Holy Icons) strongly denied both propositions. They maintained that the image differs from the prototype according to its essence (κατ'ουσίαν), and that its veneration is no more idolatry than the honour paid to Imperial effigies is a form of Emperor-worship. It is interesting to observe that in defending the symbolic nature of religious representations, the Iconodules used arguments put forward by pagan writers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries who distinguished between the statues set up to honour the gods and the gods themselves to whom alone worship was offered.

The key argument of the Iconodules was based on the Doctrine of the Incarnation, as defined by the Council of Chalcedon. Already implicit in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Canon of the Trullan Council, it was **initially** clearly and consistently **propounded** in the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century by St John of Damascus, the leading Theologian of his time. For him the Holy Icons are not only “*silent sermons,*” “*books of the illiterate*” and “*memorials of the Mysteries of God*” but also visible signs of the Sanctification of matter made possible by the Incarnation.

The Invisible and Indescribable **Attributes of the Word of God** became visible and describable in the Flesh of the Incarnated **Son of God, our Lord and Saviour** Jesus Christ in His visible and human Nature. **As such they** are truly representations of God. The essential link established by **St John of Damascus** between the meaning of Icons and the Theology of the Incarnation **as well as the** essential distinction between “*worship*” or “*adoration*” which are due to God alone, and the relative “*veneration*” due to images of Christ and the Saints, underlie the Dogmatic definitions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council and remain the foundation of Orthodox Teaching on religious art.

Iconoclasm gained the support of the public authorities of Byzantium in 726, when Emperor Leo III openly declared his opposition to the veneration of religious images. The destruction, on the Emperor's orders, of a highly venerated Icon of Christ provoked a riot in the capital of the Byzantine Empire, while Leo's Iconoclast intentions led to an insurrection in Greece. The crisis was further aggravated in 730 when Leo III issued an edict forbidding the **use** of Icons and ordering the destruction of all sacred images. His Iconoclast programme **was enforced by law and the government proceeded to persecute any** opposition. The result of this decision was that Holy Icons were forcibly removed from churches **and homes of the Orthodox Christians**. Mural paintings depicting religious subjects were defaced, liturgical objects and vestments on which these subjects were portrayed were confiscated and Saints' relics were desecrated and burnt. **Although** precise details of the persecution of Iconodules in the reign of Leo III (741) are lacking, there is evidence that many of them were put to death, mutilated or exiled. The Patriarch Germanos, who refused to subscribe to the edict of 730, was forced to resign. Iconoclasm reached its peak in the reign of Leo's son Constantine V (741-75). At first he proceeded with great caution and only after assuring his position by **means of** skilful propaganda and judicious Episcopal appointments, **launched his Iconoclast policy**. In contrast to his father, he held **extremely articulate** theological views. In 745 the Emperor convened a Church Council in Constantinople, attended by 338 Bishops, which unanimously condemned

the veneration of Icon as a form of idolatry, decreed their destruction and excommunicated the leaders of the Iconodules, notably its greatest Theologian, St John of Damascus. This “*headless council*,” as it was called by the Orthodox because no Patriarch was present (neither the Pope nor the eastern Patriarchs had sent representatives and the See of Constantinople was then vacant), bolstered the Iconoclast programme with Theological arguments. Constantine V’s government, secure in the doctrinal support of virtually the entire Byzantine Episcopate, proceeded to implement the council’s decrees. Destruction of religious art and an increasingly brutal persecution of Iconodules were now accompanied by a régime of terror instigated by the state authorities against Monks who, in this period, were the staunchest supporters of the veneration of images. Many of them were forced to flee to outlying regions of the Empire where Orthodoxy was still maintained, particularly to Crimea and southern Italy.

The reign of Constantine V was later regarded by the Orthodox as marking the climax of persecution and heresy. The government **forbade Holy Icons** and prayers **addressed** to the Saints. **Holy** relics **were** destroyed and even the veneration of the Holy Mother of God, the Theotokos, was attacked. Most of these excesses, ceased after the Emperor’s death. His successor, Leo IV (775-80), **although** an Iconoclast by conviction, pursued a moderate policy, partly under the influence of his wife Irene, who was a fervent **Iconodule**. Persecutions against the Monks ceased. After Leo’s death, Irene became Regent, on behalf of her young son Constantine VI. The Iconodules were able to oust their opponents from power. Its victory was not achieved without a show of force. In 786, a Church Council was convened by Empress Irene in Constantinople **in order** to restore the **veneration** of **Holy Icons** that **had been destroyed** by soldiers of the Imperial Guard. When these rebellious regiments were replaced by loyal **Orthodox** troops who were transferred to the capital from Thrace, Empress Irene was able to secure the triumph of Orthodoxy. In 787, a Council consisting of 350 Orthodox Bishops, presided over by the Orthodox Patriarch Tarasius of Constantinople, assembled in Nicene. It annulled the decisions of the Council of 754, **which were** declared as heresy, and solemnly restored the **veneration of Holy Icons**. The Doctrine of the **Seventh Ecumenical** Council on the veneration of Icons, reads as follows:

*“We define with all accuracy and care that the venerable and Holy Icons be set up like the form of the venerable and Life-giving Cross, inasmuch as matter consisting of colours and of small stones and of other material is appropriate in the Holy Church of God, on sacred vessels and on vestments, on walls, on panels, in houses and on roads, as well as the Image of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, that of our undefiled Lady, the Holy Mother of God, those of the Angels worthy of honour, and those of all Holy and pious men. For the more frequently they are seen by means of painted representation, the more those who behold them are aroused to remember and to desire the prototypes and to give them salutation, honour and veneration (ασπασμόν καί τιμητικήν προσκύνησιν), but not the true worship (τήν αληθινήν λατρείαν) of our faith which benefits only the Divine Nature; and to offer them both incense and candles in the same way as to the form of the venerable and Life-giving Cross and to the Holy Books and to other sacred objects, as was the custom even of the ancients.”*

**Empress** Irene's restoration of the veneration of Icons did not, however, weaken the strength of the Iconoclasts. The accession of Leo V in 813 inaugurated a period of thirty years during which Iconoclasm was once again the official doctrine of the Empire. In some respects, this period marked a return to the religious policy of Leo III and Constantine V. A council held in St Sophia of Constantinople repudiated the Seventh Ecumenical Council and decreed the destruction of Icons (815). In the same year Patriarch Nicephorus, a leading Theologian of the Iconoclasts, was deposed. The reigns of Leo V (813-20) and especially of Theophilus (829-42) were marked by persecutions, the principal victims being the Studite Monks. This second wave of Iconoclasm seems to have lacked the vigour and assurance that characterised the movement in the previous century. The persecutions were milder and intermittent. The council of 815, despite its unconditional condemnation of **Holy Icons**, declined to equate Icons with idols. By the time Michael III ascended the throne (842) the force of Iconoclasm was largely spent and the final restoration of the veneration of **Holy Icons** was proclaimed in March 843 by a Council in Constantinople. It was convened on the initiative of Empress Theodora and thus **peace was restored within** the Byzantine Empire. This event, still commemorated as "*The Festival of Orthodoxy*" in the Orthodox Church on the first Sunday of Lent, is for the Eastern Church an epilogue to the epoch of the Ecumenical Councils and the prelude to the history of the medieval Byzantine **Orthodox** Church.

The Iconoclast controversy affected the subsequent history of the Eastern Church in a variety of ways. Its results were particularly far-reaching in the fields of art, Monasticism and church-state relations. In addition, it proved to be a significant landmark in the history of the **relationship** between the Churches of Byzantium and Rome (**East and West**).

The intimate relationship between **Holy Icons** and Christological Doctrine established by the Seventh Ecumenical Council and sanctioned by the Festival of Orthodoxy, led to the adoption of a new **form** of church decoration characteristic of Byzantine religious art during the next three centuries. The mosaics and wall-paintings with which the interior of churches were now profusely adorned, were executed according to strict Theological principles and in close connection with the Liturgical function and the Eucharistic connotations. The hierarchical arrangement of these decorations **were** combined to produce a symbolic image of the Cosmos. On the cupolas and apses, which represent Heaven portraying Christ the Pantocrator (Almighty), his Mother, the Ever Virgin Mary and Theotokos, or the Angels **are depicted**. **On** the lower level of the niches and lunettes scenes of Christ's Life on earth and the figures of Saints are depicted. **Furthermore**, the Hierarchy of Heaven and earth bear witness to the central Doctrines of the Christian Faith and the main events of the Liturgical year **were** illustrated.

The increased popularity of religious art in Byzantium after 843 was not confined to mosaics or frescoes. The veneration of panel paintings and the closely related **veneration of Holy relics** reached unprecedented heights. The faithful sought the Supernatural Grace and Help of God through the venerated relics of Saints.

The 9<sup>th</sup> century was also a decisive period in the development of the Byzantine Liturgy. The Byzantine Rite **that** had been evolving since the 5<sup>th</sup> century, acquired all the essential features which it still possesses **to this day**. A great number of hymns

were composed during the Iconoclastic period – notably by St John of Damascus and St Theodore of Studite – which formed the basic material of several Liturgical Books of the Orthodox Church such as the “*Triodion*” (Lenten period), “*Pentekostarion*” (Pentecost period) and the “*Oktoechos*” (Eight Tones). After the defeat of Iconoclasm the Monks **who were** the leaders of this Liturgical revival, adopted the Jerusalem **Liturgical** ritual that resulted in the synthesis between the Palestinian and Byzantine Rites. Henceforth the official Rite of Constantinople was formed. The Liturgical Tradition of Byzantium displayed the same tendency in this period towards systematisation and uniformity that we observe in post-Iconoclastic Byzantine Church decoration. It was then that Eastern Christian Hymnography incorporated a rich and elaborate Liturgical body which remains one of the crowning achievements of the medieval Orthodox Byzantine Church.