

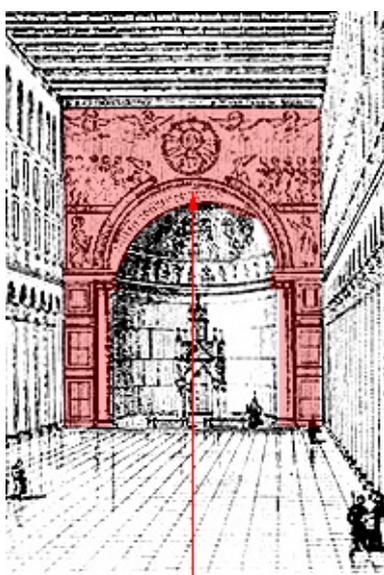
# A Question of Authority

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## Prologue

This essay may be considered as it has been conceived: a headlong riot through a mass of Orthodoxy in an attempt to locate my own practice in Iconography. A search; seeking to discover what Iconography is at heart, and do I have any place to settle within its walls. As a Roman Catholic and English will I be admitted? May I stay perched on the doorstep, peering up through a small window at the glimpses and flashes of Glory, picking up crumbs from the table or do I have a place at that table, in this house, in the heart of the family that is the Body of Christ. Am I acceptable as an Iconographer, as a Christian, can I become a Saint.

I began, gazing up at Christ, in smallish Victorian Neo-Gothic church. I didn't know it was Victorian or Neo-Gothic and I certainly didn't know it was small because in those days I was very little. I took it for granted; Jesus Christ always gesturing towards his most Sacred Heart, the most beautiful statue, just to the



**chancel arch**

right of the Sanctuary. I didn't know that was the Sanctuary, I didn't know it was a statue of the Sacred Heart. I saw Jesus, and I saw that he is beautiful, the most beautiful of all the sons of Adam. I looked up and on the Chancel arch someone had painted Christ Pantocrator. I didn't know it was Christ Pantocrator. I knew it was Jesus and that he is greater than all the Great Lords of the earth. He was bold and clear and solid. Maybe the picture was stenciled I didn't know and it didn't bother me to know. He was there, above, Lord and Master of everything and I didn't have to worry about finding him because he is always with me and nothing can overpower him. They were both pictures of the Jesus I knew existed from the beginning, who entered into time, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, died and was buried. Then to the amazement of the angels, consternation of the devils, joy and wonder of Men, he Rose from the dead; shattered the gates of Sheol and in one great act of Love drew out of death all those held in its grip since the beginning; news that Heaven is flung open and all may enter in. They were not him and yet they 'spoke' to me of him in the words so dear to the heart of a child, pictures that I could read then in my childishness and that remain imprinted on my mind's eye in my adulthood. And so gradually I reached maturity. I had left that little parish behind many years before, but I had not left Jesus, he had not left me and he kept me close to his most Sacred Heart; kept in the innermost sanctuary of the Church, and always teaching me more,

opening up the treasures that were expressed in those brief words that pass so swiftly in the mass yet say everything about Him who Is.

And I learnt that the statue is of the Sacred Heart and the picture on the Chancel arch is the Pantocrator, and this did not distract or lead away but drew me closer. And the more I discovered was new, the more I discovered it had been there all the time, and I had known it and not known it.

It was a given, the attraction to beautiful things, the attraction in the true-beauty of the Passion, the all, the impact of vision in practical things. It was no 'vision' of a visionary but a singularly pragmatic engaging sight with that which is truly there. And then again an engagement with sight beyond what is there, exposition of what my heart rejoiced and reveled in truth.

And I saw and recognized as friend and true - Icons. Here again was Jesus, same gestures, same look, same voice flung across time and space. Look, here is his Mother, here are the saints, here are all the Gospels writ large on walls and miniscule in manuscripts. It did not seem strange or odd to think 'here will I dwell', in this work will I find my home. Neither arrogant nor rude I claimed the images for my own, little knowing that they belonged to someone else.

Iconography I discovered; so I thought. A most happy fulfillment of knowledge of God and his love for Man in pictures. A way to proclaim from the rooftops without making any sound, to coax, to call, to reach past barriers, to present my faith without conflict, to seduce without seduction, drawing by the use of gold and colour and right proportion, in small inconsequential detail the fullness and boldness of the Faith in which I had come to believe as surely as I can breathe.

And then I found out it wasn't mine. It is Orthodox, and it holds the key to all the Medieval English and European arts. It is the hermeneutical key to the visual imagery throughout Christendom, and I found that I was considered a trespasser and an outsider. This did not worry me greatly, if it speaks of Jesus, the true Jesus, and he makes me to walk with him amongst his Icons, then he will open up the way.

So these few words may be considered a wandering through the halls of someone else's house in the hope that I will not be asked to leave in the immediate future.

I am not Orthodox, only in that I am Roman Catholic. I speak neither Greek nor Russian. I have to rely on others to translate and interpret the writings that are of Orthodoxy. The mind, the heart and the thought of this brother of mine may remain closed to me. We are of the same family, but we have misunderstood each other for a time. God willing we shall not remain forever apart, but in this meantime, I beg pardon for any misunderstanding of my older brother, and any misrepresentation I may inadvertently give of his meaning as I am only one, and a small sister with little understanding of judgment and laws<sup>1</sup> and I do not mean to trespass.

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<sup>1</sup> "A man who is weak and short-lived, with little understanding of judgement and laws' Wisdom 9:5 The Divine Office, Collins, London, 1974, reprint 1997, pp 370.

# A Question of Authority

“Religion knows of re-form, the return to unsullied practice as instituted by the founder or performed by virtuous ancestors. It cannot hail deliberate departures from the ancient pattern as improvements because such departures which have no authority in the past are ipso facto impertinent if not blasphemous.”

E.H.Gombrich, *The Debate on Primitivism in Ancient Rhetoric; Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes.*, Vol. 29, 1966, pp.24-38

“Saint-Andrew workshop is a community of independant iconographers who follow the teachings of Father Egon Sendler and work in cooperation with Saint-Georges workshop of Meudon.

Their purpose is to spread the beauty of Christianity through byzantine art. Their murals, portable frescoes and icons strictly adhere [to] the canonical and aesthetic rules of traditional iconography which have developed through the past two thousand years.”

<http://www.atelier-st-andre.net/en/pages/presentation/presentation.html>

## I

The first thing that is usual to discover in Icons is a certain rigidity and formula. One can recognise quickly and easily who is Christ, who is the Theotokos. After only some small exposure one can identify with ease the various saints and gospel scenes, particularly if one has some small knowledge of Greek or Russian since it is quite usual to write beside the various persons their name. In fact, if one could not recognize or identify the image it would no longer be an Icon.

An Icon is...

The word Icon comes from the Greek *eikon* meaning 'image'. It has come to express more than its original general application to any image, and is now the summary title of all that is has been retained for us in the Byzantine Christian legacy that is the Orthodox Church, be it Greek, Russian, Coptic or any other Eastern expression thereof.

An idol is one thing, a statue is another thing, and an icon (or picture) is a different thing. For an idol differs from an icon in that the icon is a likeness of a true thing and its original, whereas the idol is an image of a false inexistent thing, and is not the likeness of an original, according to Origen and Theodoret – just as were the idols of the false and inexistent gods of the Greeks...<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Agapius, a Heiromonach; Nicodemus, a Monk; Dorotheus translated Cummings, D., *The Rudder (Pedalion) of the metaphorical ship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of the Orthodox Christians or All Sacred and Divine Canons*, Orthodox Christian Educational Society, Chicago, 1956. Pp 414, note 6.

So an Icon is the likeness of a 'true thing'. In the book of Genesis we find this same reference to image and likeness 'in the beginning':

God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth'.

God created man in the image of himself,  
in the image of God he created him,  
male and female he created them. <sup>3</sup>

The 'true thing' is God himself.

But God, is God, the one who Is; uncircumscribable, containing all perfections, eternal being Himself. How on earth, literally, in our finitude to his infinity, is it possible to make a true icon? It is expressly forbidden in Deuteronomy:

You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, THE LORD your God, am a jealous God and I punish the fathers' fault in the sons, the grandsons and the great-grandsons of those who hate me; but I show kindness to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments.<sup>4</sup>

The only true Icon possible can be found in the image and likeness that God created 'in the beginning' in his original intention, but we have no pattern of that original Man until the coming of Christ, the promised Saviour; True God and true Man: the new Adam.

Jesus spoke openly: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."<sup>5</sup>

But we can say with Pontius Pilate: "Truth?... what is that?"<sup>6</sup> and again in the fearful sight of the stricture of Deuteronomy what answer can one make?

St John of Damascus in his famous *Three Apologies Against those who Attack the Divine Images* demonstrates clearly in opposition to those who would have us bereft of visual imagery that Icons are not in opposition to the Law, the Law of Life. He offers to the hesitant the example and actions of the Patriarchs, the Fathers of our Faith of the Old Testament

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<sup>3</sup> Gn 1:26-27

<sup>4</sup> Gn 5:8-10

<sup>5</sup> Jn 14:6

<sup>6</sup> Jn 18:38

We are no longer under custodians, but we have received from God the ability to discern what may be represented and what is uncircumscribed...

Use every kind of drawing, word or colour. Fear not; have no anxiety; discern between the different kind of worship. Abraham bowed... Jacob bowed to Esau and also to Joseph's staff... Bowed but did not adore.

For adoration is one thing and that which is offered in order to honor something of great excellence is another.<sup>7</sup>

And it is quite clear by whom this discernment is given - through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; as one can read in the farewell discourses of John's Gospel at the Last Supper, Jesus returns again and again to the subject of the Holy Spirit.

I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you...<sup>8</sup>

I have said these things to you while still with you; but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.<sup>9</sup>

When the Advocate comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness. And you too will be my witnesses, because you have been with me from the outset.<sup>10</sup>

I still have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you now. But when the Spirit of Truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking as from himself but will say only what he has learnt; and he will tell you of the things to come...<sup>11</sup>

And this is all well and good and right and fitting and rhetoric in a most acceptable and usual way. Icons are as I have described and rightly so they are. But how have they remained thus, rigorously guarded, what is peculiar to Orthodoxy, ergo also to Iconography, that it has remained full, complete and vigorous; without deviation either to the right (in completely static immovable form of image, only subject to scale) or to the left (in constant flux, at the mercy of fashion of artist's whim: see the

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<sup>7</sup> John of Damascus, St.; translated by Anderson, David, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against those who Attack the Divine Images*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y, 1997, pg 18.

<sup>8</sup> Jn 14:16-17

<sup>9</sup> Jn 14: 26

<sup>10</sup> Jn 15:26-27

<sup>11</sup> Jn 16:12-13

Renaissance and Humanistic interpretation of the Gospel scenes) From where springs their Authority?

## II

The juxtaposition of the two quotes as given at the start of this essay may begin to give the clue as to what I am endeavouring to enquire into. Thus, Gombrich's tight and apposite statement is worth repeating:

Religion knows of re-form, the return to unsullied practice as instituted by the founder or performed by virtuous ancestors. It cannot hail deliberate departures from the ancient pattern as improvements because such departures which have no authority in the past are ipso facto impertinent if not blasphemous.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus Christ was not a painter. At no time and in no place in the Gospels is it recorded that he instructed his disciples to begin making images and yet Atelier St Andre, an Icon painting workshop in Switzerland under the tutelage of Fr Egon Sendler<sup>13</sup>, voices their icons as *bona fide* in that their "icons strictly adhere [to] the canonical and aesthetic rules of traditional iconography which have developed through the past two thousand years."<sup>14</sup> How have these two positions been reconciled?

The difficulty is quickly exposed as stemming from a recurring problem in the history of the Church, the place of Scripture. Is the only witness and exposition of the Gospel, the Good news of Christ's death and resurrection from the dead, contained in the Bible, *sola scriptura*? If one's faith depends solely on the elements that may be gleaned from what is contained therein, one is then led onto the next problem, what parts of the Bible have authority, a miscellaneous collection of texts brought together and by whom?

Authority leads to a question of truth and springs from the word 'author'; the question is, who is the author and what trust can I place in his opinion? The words themselves offer us the solution; The Author is the one who contains being in his very nature, He who Is<sup>15</sup>, on whom all things depend, through whom all things came into being, the One who is not dependant on any other for his existence but gives existence to all that is. The Author is identifiable as The Creator of all that is,<sup>16</sup> the One who 'spoke and it was made.'

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<sup>12</sup> E.H.Gombrich, *The Debate on Primitivism in Ancient Rhetoric; Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes.*, Vol. 29, 1966, pp.24

<sup>13</sup> Iconographer and author of the highly sought after book *The Icon: Image of the Invisible*, Oakwood Pubs, Torrence, California, 1999

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.atelier-st-andre.net/en/pages/presentation/presentation.html>

<sup>15</sup> Ex 3:14

<sup>16</sup> See opening chapters of: Sheed, F.J., *Theology and Sanity*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1947

Thus, author-ity belongs rightfully to the author, therefore to God, and all earthly authority may be said to derive from relation to The Author. And so we hear

'You would have no power over me' replied Jesus 'if it had not been given you from above...'<sup>17</sup>

And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority."<sup>18</sup>

Jesus, Son of God, is the only one who can teach with authority. The Orthodox Church sees it simply:<sup>19</sup> Tradition and faith in the Apostolic succession: that

... mysterious thread binding the whole historical fullness of Church life into one catholic whole.<sup>20</sup>

Fruit of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and fulfillment of the promise to worship in Spirit and in Truth, thus the last portion of the Creed may be understood as entirely related to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy, catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.<sup>21</sup>

It is in this light of the Holy Spirit as the revealer of mysteries, (look again at Jn 14:16-17; Jn 14: 26; Jn 15:26-27 and Jn 16:12-13 pgs 5-6) that one may begin to understand the Orthodox Church and its relation to Tradition and Scripture, that Florovsky dares to say:

We can say that Scripture is a God-inspired scheme or image (*eikon*) of truth, but not truth itself.<sup>22</sup>

Jesus Christ is 'the Way, the Truth and the Life.'<sup>23</sup> All other expressions of the Church about him are less than the sum of his Person, but of no less worth in their reliability and authority as ways to come to know of him. It also brings into relief how it is that objects such as the Gospel book and Icons are treated with the same reverence, venerated with the same outward signs (bowing, kissing, processing, blessing)

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<sup>17</sup> Jn 19:11

<sup>18</sup> Mk 1:22

<sup>19</sup> and in total accord with Roman Catholic Church, they run in the same direction.

<sup>20</sup> Florovsky, Georges, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Nordland Publishing Company, Belmont, Massachusetts, [c.1972] pg 45. Catholic here referring to the notion of the Church as catholic meaning encompassing the entire world, all of Mankind; not Catholic as opposed to Protestant.

<sup>21</sup> The Apostle's Creed: the earliest formulation of the Church's belief. See also, Ratzinger, J. *Introduction to Christianity*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2004

<sup>22</sup> Florovsky, Georges, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Nordland Publishing Company, Belmont, Massachusetts, [c.1972] pg 48

<sup>23</sup> Jn 14:6

To discover the mind of the Orthodox and their relation to the Spirit and Tradition Florovsky 'sings a hymn' to the Church born of the Spirit and explicit in Tradition:

Unity in the Spirit embraces in a mysterious time-conquering fashion, the faithful of all generations. This time-conquering unity is manifested and revealed in the experience of the Church, especially in its Eucharistic experience. The Church is the living image of eternity within time.<sup>24</sup>

The Church knows that it is a unity of all times, and as such it builds up its life. Therefore the Church thinks of the past not as something that has been accomplished, but as something existing in the catholic fullness of the one Body of Christ. Tradition reflects this victory over time. To learn from tradition, or, still better, *in tradition*, is to learn from the fullness of this time-conquering experience of the Church.<sup>25</sup>

It means we can learn from history as we can from revelation. Loyalty to tradition does not mean loyalty to bygone times and to outward authority; it is a living connexion with the fulness of Church experience. Reference to Tradition is no historical inquiry. Tradition is not limited to Church archaeology. Tradition is no outward testimony which can be accepted by an outsider. The Church alone is the living witness of tradition; and only from inside, from within the Church, can tradition be felt and accepted as a certainty. Tradition is the witness of the Spirit; the Spirit's unceasing revelation and preaching of good tidings. For the living members of the Church it is no outward historical authority, but the eternal and continual voice of God – not only the voice of the past, but the voice of eternity. Faith seeks its foundations not merely in the example and bequest of the past, but in the grace of the Holy Ghost, witnessing always, now and ever, world without end.<sup>26</sup>

Tradition, springs from *traditio*, passing on of the Creed, the tradition par excellence, from the first apostles - their eye witness – and through their successors - witnesses to their witness:

Only to the hierarchy has it been given the authority to teach "with authority". The hierarchs have received this power to teach, not from the church-people but from the High Priest, Jesus Christ, in the Sacrament of Orders<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Florovsky, Georges, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Nordland Publishing Company, Belmont, Massachusetts, [c.1972] pg 45

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. pg 46

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.46

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.49

Thus their authority may be assured as it springs from the fount of authority, the Word through whom all things were made<sup>28</sup>, Eternal Word, of the Father. However, this is not the complete picture, as the Holy Spirit pervades and makes one the entire people of God into the one Body of Christ, so too the authority of the Church properly belongs to the entirety of that body. The bishop may have received the full power of authority to speak in the name of his flock, but it is on behalf of his flock that he speaks, and should he deviate from the Tradition as expressed by the Church, united generation upon generation, he may find himself outside the corporate action and life of the Church. In fact Meyendorff states:

A regional consensus is therefore a more authoritative sign of Truth than the opinion of one bishop, and a universal consensus is the highest authority in matters of faith.<sup>29</sup>

Tradition in the Orthodox Church then holds place subject only to Scripture in excellence and even there as Bouteneff in *Sweeter than Honey* puts it succinctly:

All of the expressions of the Church's tradition – patristic, liturgical, conciliar, and canonical must be shown to be biblical, even as their very function is to read and interpret the Bible rightly.<sup>30</sup>  
...since God's final revelation in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ... there are effectively no new teachings. There are... new formulations, new expressions, and new implications drawn from the revelation given us in the person of Jesus Christ as witnessed in Holy Scripture.<sup>31</sup>

And so one sees immediately that everything in Icons, as in Tradition as a whole, and with the pattern of the saints set before us, the life of the Church has only one proclamation to make in season and out of season; it is easy to discern what is and what is not of this Tradition it is a Question of what is or is not of Christ.

And so in comprehending Tradition, if one wishes to propound its 'timeless qualities', these may be considered abundantly clear when viewed less as a rigid adherence to rules, enforced by some exterior force but rather as springing up from an interior, true, relationship with Jesus Christ, expressed in the community of believers which is the Church who is the living witness and icon of the Body of Christ.

If one attempts to discover a canon (in the sense of a law to be kept) or rules to be obeyed one will be swiftly disillusioned. There is no 'canon law'

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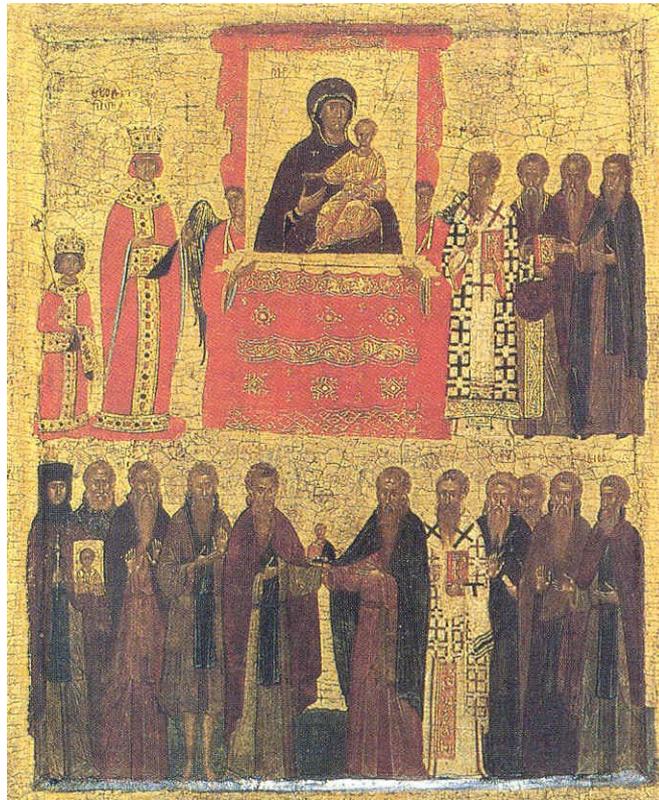
<sup>28</sup> Jn 1:1-3

<sup>29</sup> Meyendorff, John, *Living Tradition*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 1978, p.36

<sup>30</sup> Bouteneff, Peter, *Sweeter than Honey: Orthodox Thinking on Dogma and Truth*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 2006 p 143.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p.135

to be applied; even with an entire Ecumenical Council<sup>32</sup> devoted to the question of Icons, culminating in the Triumph of Orthodoxy



*Icon with the Triumph of Orthodoxy, Constantinople (?), second half of the fourteenth century. Egg tempera on wood, 39 x 31cm British Museum, inv.1988.0411.1*

This is not an isolated instance in the Orthodox Church. There is little practical dogma or theology listed outside the daily practice of her Liturgy and Tradition.

The events of the history of the Orthodox Church have culminated in the entire logic and theology of her teaching being lodged in a marvellous way in the Liturgy and praxis; in her lived experience. To the Western understanding, and the Latin exposition of the faith expounded at length, contemplated deeply, dogmatised and furthered in the written works of her saints, theologians and popes (St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Hilary, Pope St Gregory the Great, St Dominic to name but few), this is a remarkably alien position.

Scrutiny of the Orthodox Church reveals centuries of suppression under Islamic rule. Although granted freedom to continue in existence, the Orthodox Church was despoiled of all opportunity to evangelise even

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<sup>32</sup> The Seventh Ecumenical Council AD 787, reaffirmed in the Synod of Constantinople AD 843, the Triumph of Orthodoxy, feast inaugurated to affirm the place of Icons in the Orthodox Church in perpetuity: celebrated on the First Sunday of Great Lent, and named "the Sunday of Orthodoxy"

amongst her own members. The various Eastern rites were all considered as one and placed at the variable mercy of the Greek Patriarch (henceforth known as an Ethnarch: Head of Christian Nations) who was in his turn at the mercy of the reigning Sultanate. Deprived of all schools, books and properly trained clergy from AD 1454 until the late nineteenth century<sup>33</sup>. Dosethius, Patriarch of Jerusalem in the late 1600's, published some works in Rumania in the absence of printing presses of his own, but his was a solitary work.

Owing to its liturgy and the works of the Fathers preserved in the monastic libraries, the Church managed nevertheless to get across the essential burden of its message... A kind of instinct of self-preservation and unlimited faithfulness to the truth taught by the Church as preserved by the liturgy – still a living force – and by the works of the Fathers...<sup>34</sup>

The monasteries, one thinks particularly of those communities on Mount Athos, St Catherine's on Mount Sinai, and even in the Trinity Sergius Lavra in Sergiev Posad, Russia, which may all be rightly said to have played a primary role in the tenacious and faithful adherence to the truth at various times in all its manifestations: the Divine Liturgy, the ritual, the sacraments, the prayer, access to authoritative texts of the Fathers of the Church, to icons, to Orthodoxy itself.

And so it is that Florensky is entirely accurate in his assertion that:

The Orthodox taste, the Orthodox temper, is felt but is not subject to arithmetical calculation. Orthodoxy is shown not proved. That is why there is only one way to understand Orthodoxy: direct Orthodox experience.... To become Orthodox, it is necessary to immerse oneself all at once in the very element of Orthodoxy, to begin living in an Orthodox way. There is no other way.<sup>35</sup>

### III

But, how then was this Tradition applied thus to Iconography? It is marvellously awful to attempt to trace. Iconographers legendarily and historically remain mostly anonymous. Works are attributed to individuals most aptly by tradition. One cannot work at the history and furtherance of Icon painting as a systematic chronology. It has been viewed

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<sup>33</sup> Persecuted to death even up into the mid nineteenth century: Patriarch Gregory V, hanged by the Turks in 1821 on Easter Sunday from the great portecochiere of his patriarchate in Phanar, just after he had celebrated the solemn paschal liturgy, the gate has remained closed to this day in memory of his martyrdom. See: Meyendorff, John, *The Orthodox Church: Its Past and its Role in the World Today*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 1981 Pp 90 - 100

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. pgs 90 and 97

<sup>35</sup> Florensky, Pavel, *The Pillar and Ground of Truth*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1997, pg,9

geographically and had the terms of 'schools' applied, rightly or wrongly; the Art of the Icon being outside the Western understanding, as alien, as Orthodox. But from the little that can be garnered, the last will and testament left by a Cretan Icon Painter, Angelo Acontato, dated 1436; the handbook of Dionysius of Fournà c.1670 – post1744; various sketchbooks and notebooks gathered from nineteenth century Russian examples, impossible to date the miscellany recorded. It may be understood that the living Tradition of the Orthodox Church retained and furthered its integrity, as attested to by the works that continue to exist. Sometimes better, sometimes worse in its expression. The Tradition passed on from generation, to generation, be it in the rich context of the monastic life (and still practiced on Mount Athos) or amongst the lay people, handed from father to son, master to pupil to this day.

Doolan, an iconographer, sometime student of Leonid Ouspensky recalls:

Later the next week, in Ouspensky's flat and in the first hours of painting instruction, he began to talk about composition and application of colors. He concluded with the observation that took me by surprise: "There are no rules." I thought I had misunderstood him, because we had been discussing rules extensively, that is the iconographic canon and its Tradition. It seemed to me that a study of the rules was something that one would spend one's life pursuing... He was referring not to the content of the icon, but to the art of painting the icon... he saw each icon on its own terms, to be painted from, and within, the Tradition – all the time remaining an authentically creative act.<sup>36</sup>

Hand written notes, texts, drawings and studies, prayers and directions all inter-mingle to demonstrate solid faith engendering a solid art, a sure theology spanning the open spaces wherever they might be found: embellishing but more than that, catechising, teaching illuminating, walls, curtains, doors liturgical furniture, screens/iconostasis, personal panels in the home, in the monasteries and libraries of the rich lavishly illuminated manuscripts. This is the 'canon' that is referred to, the treasures of a visual language, available and open to all, interacting with the Divine Liturgy, showing forth the poetry, deep and certain of the Fathers contained in the hymns and psalmody, eagerly illustrating and making visible the Bridegroom's embrace of his Bride, the Church.

Florensky writes in *Iconostasis*:

Lifting creativity to the very heights of human achievement, canonical tradition frees the artist's energy for new attainments... the demands of canonical tradition... is therefore for the artist not an enslavement but a liberation... The true artist...wants not his *own* (at any cost) truth but rather the objectively beautiful and artistically incarnate truth of things – and he cares nothing at all about the pride's mean-spirited question whether he is the first or

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<sup>36</sup>Doolan, Patrick, *Recovering the Icon: The Life and Work of Leonid Ouspensky*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 2008 pg, 97.

the hundredth to speak this truth. If the work is true then it establishes its own value.<sup>37</sup>

The Tradition is neither "mechanical reproduction of an existing icon" nor "self-indulgent 'original' artistic fantasy"<sup>38</sup> it grows out of encounter with ancient icons - "The old icons are the best teachers."<sup>39</sup> Other lights are given anecdotally of a group of people asking if they could film Leonid Alexandrovich Ouspensky.

He found the idea extremely odd, and turned them out saying, "What next? You'll want to film me *praying!*" For Ousepensky, the bond between the icon and prayer was self-evident, primary, essential. And this was especially the case with *liturgical* prayer. He felt this keenly. Once years before, when he was beginning to paint icons, he was in the Church of the Three Hierarchs, and as the choir chanted, listening to the hymnography, he saw the connection between liturgical art and liturgical music, the church's iconography and the church's hymnography. They are interdependent; they imply and complete one another.<sup>40</sup>

And in another place quite simply:

The Icon completes the Liturgy and explains it...<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the Tradition of the Church together with Scripture includes the fullness of the Icon: it springs forth from it, runs full circle and provides the matter whereby one may "reverence God and his friends" and follow the "inspiration of the Holy Spirit"<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Florensky, Pavel, *Iconostasis*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 2000 pg, 80.

<sup>38</sup> Doolan, Patrick, *Recovering the Icon: The Life and Work of Leonid Ouspensky*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 2008 pg, 97.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* pg 97

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* pg 97

<sup>41</sup> Ouspensky, Leonid, *The Theology of the Icon, Volume 1*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 1992 pg 9

<sup>42</sup> John of Damascus, St.; translated by Anderson, David, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against those who Attack the Divine Images*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 1997, Pp 23-24

## In Conclusion

Know therefore, diligent student, that when you wish to undertake this science, you must look for and find a learned master, whom you will wish to surpass in some respects if he teaches you clearly as we shall direct.

If you only find one who is unlearned and unskilful, do as we did and see if you can find some original works... and copy them at any opportunity...

Work well my friend, without sparing your efforts, but with the utmost diligence and care, so that you may be taught this art and master it completely; for it is a heavenly task given of God.<sup>43</sup>

The Tradition and practice of Icon painting is life in the heart of the Church, it is inextricably part and will not suffer to be separated from her. It arrives, one single exclamation, proclaiming the wonder that is Christianity, God has become Man and taken all our shame away.

It proclaims no new message, but a cry that is always new sears its works, God has care for Mankind and will not be dissuaded, he has come to find the lost one, heal the broken hearted and bring back the stray. The Icon can only exist in the light of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The Divine Liturgy of The Orthodox Church springs from the same Scripture, the same Fathers as that of the Roman Catholic Church. In the passing of time it is only a small step between the one to the other. We hold the same Fathers in veneration and recognise the Seven Ecumenical Councils. It is a small family and a language that is not so dissimilar. Pope Paul VI with the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras abrogated the reciprocal excommunications of 1054 in 1971.<sup>44</sup> There is much to be hoped for and all to be gained in study of Iconography even by a Roman Catholic. It requires a thorough study of theology as revealed in its Icons and saints. It requires complete fidelity to the Truth as shown in the life of the Church. It demands integrity. A theology in colour, the Icon is the place wherein the Orthodox Church expresses most clearly the full teaching of the faith in an explicit visual language. It can only impart greater depth to established practice of prayer, faith and knowledge of God; fostering much love and reverence for the wonder that is the Tradition of Orthodoxy.

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<sup>43</sup> Hetherington, Paul, *The Painter's manual of Dionysius of Fournas : an English translation [from the Greek] with commentary of cod. gr. 708 in the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library, Leningrad*, Oakwood Publications, Torrance, California, 1996, c1974. p. 4

<sup>44</sup> Gibbons, Robin, *The Eastern Churches*, CTS, London, 2006 pg 6.

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