

## Art: Iconography and Meaning of Symbols

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Christian Icons, early sympathetic and later austere, “icon writers;” the Eastern “Twelve Major Feasts” and the Crusaders’ Last Judgment. Influence of Middle East iconoclasm and hiding symbols and nominalism in Western Europe. A sketch on preparing egg tempera.

### Some Books:

If you intend to “write” icons, you need examples and detailed explanations of all the symbols. *The Meaning of Icons* is a classic although biased towards one style, but collect other icon books as well, whenever found; they go out of print very quickly. Icon patterns may be copied line for line, although when the colors are put on the icon, the end result will be slightly different, so it is best to collect any of these books possible. Some early Gallican and Irish icons are the same in general colors and forms as the Byzantine icons. Please note that no reproductions, no matter how well printed, will have the same colors as the original icons; in some the colors seem to be shifted; also, they cannot be seen from a distance and they reflect less light than the originals. Where to buy books? Pennsic merchants, art museums, religious bookstores, religious book catalogs and Amazon.com. Local bookstores tend to have only a few books of this kind if you are lucky, and totally ignore the Byzantine books. Some of the books I have:

*The Meaning of Icons* by Leonid Ousensky and Vladimir Lossky, translated by G. E. H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky (De Sinn der Ikonen), St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1982 N8189 S609713 1982 704.9’482 82-22979 ISBN 0-913836-77-X, ISBN 0-913836-99-0 (paperback) (Themes of Byzantine Icons, what their styles mean, the Byzantine “Twelve Major Feasts” and all the symbols. This is a classic in the descriptions and the “why” of the icons, as well as some other explanations, such as a long introduction about “Tradition.” There is much information, but a bias towards Russian icons, and the reproduction of the colors is not accurate. Several years ago an exhibition of the originals of these icons was shown at several museums, and as usual, the originals are much brighter and more focused.)

*Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine* (Which I call “St. Catherine’s Monastery) by John Galey, Introductions by Kurt Weitzmann and George Forsyth, Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, NY 1980 ISBN 0-385-17110-2 L of C Catalogue No: 80-951 (Dedicated to the Sinai Expedition of the Universities of Michigan and Princeton USA, and the University of Alexandria, Egypt. St. Catherine’s monastery is located at the place of the burning bush and also where the Law was given, and a sixth century monastery and church stands there and is inhabited to this day. There are some of the most beautiful icons ever produced, including a sixth century icon of Christ that is very sympathetic, and not a mirror-image face as the later Medieval icons. Also, St. Catherine’s ignored the great schism between East and West for a long time, so there are many European Crusader icons there, and one can compare Medieval Byzantine with European themes. This is my favorite book, and if you can find it, you should buy it.)

*The Glory of Bethlehem* Bargil Pixner, George Hintlian and A. Van de Heyden, 1986 Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA ISBN 0-8170-1109-9 (A few icons, mostly background on Bethlehem.

This particular book is not a “must have,” but it helps to have books that show actual rocky terrain of the places that form the backgrounds within icons. While we might say that these backgrounds are “stylized,” the actual rocks look like that! Remarkably similar to the problem of the Japan sea actually looking like mountains in real life, not just traditional paintings, and those large head lions actually occasionally showing up in Africa, an extremely vicious species.)

*Icons* Introduced by T. Talbot Rice, 1990 The Wellfleet Press, div. of Book Sales, Inc., 110 Enterprise Ave., Secaucus, NJ 07094, ISBN 1-55521-632-3 (Lots of large icons. No index. Still, any icon book is useful, if you make your own index. Categorize under: if it looks good, buy it. There are some very good icons in this book.)

*Paintings of the Dark Church*, Halis Yenipinar & Seracettin Sahin; editor Fatih Cimok, photographs Suat Eman; layout Guzin Sancakli; 1998, A Turizm Yayinlari Ltd. Sti; Sifa Hamami Sokak 18, Sultanahmet, Istanbul 34400, Turkey, ISBN 975-7199-50-8 (The icons of three rock-cut caverns in Cappadocia, the area that is now modern Turkey. “These three churches are the products of an era when, after a period of over two hundred years, the Byzantine army was able to take the offensive and push the Muslim invaders to the east of the Euphrates and to south Syria in the second half of the tenth and first half of the eleventh centuries. This period of peace, however, was short and lasted until the arrival of Selcuk Turks following their victory at Manzikert in 1071. After the battle the Selcuks swept central Anatolia and raided the Byzantine territory as far as Nicaea...” Although some icons now have the facial features defaced, especially eyes, the style and painting technique is both sympathetic and stylized, graceful, complicated and simple at the same time, in short, great works of art, while being in strict iconographic tradition. There is hope in these icons, in spite of the fact that the monks were under a state of siege at the time. Faces are not the austere mirrors of the later Russians or of Romanesque Europe of the same period, but highlights are more natural, although stylized and graceful. There are lots of flowery decorations between icons; but no Irish or Scythian “knot-work.” Except for the better use of color and facial details, these tenth and eleventh century icons are in the same style seen in all periods of Byzantine art. The only reason it is not my favorite book is my sadness that Cappadocia is no longer filled with active monasteries. Centuries earlier, in the fourth century, Cappadocia had been the home of St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory Nazianzus, St. John Chrysostom, and many others who were possibly the greatest writers in church history.)

*Antioch The Lost Ancient City*, Christine Kondoleon, 2000, Princeton University Press, 41 William St., Princeton, N.J. 08540 ISBN 0-691-04932-7 ISBN 0-691-4933-5 (paper) Published on the occasion of the exhibition *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City* at the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA, Oct 7 2000 - Feb 4, 2001; The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH March 18 - June 3, 2001; and The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD Sept 16 - Dec 30, 2001. (Lots of floor mosaics; and at the end a few icons and the chalice that is usually at the Cloisters in NYC. At least this book carefully explains any symbols, and also gives lives of Saints such as Thekla. The city once called Antioch, the first stop on the silk route to the east, is now the city of Antykia in Turkey, and is still a cultural crossroads but not as large and famous as it was.)

*Light from the East Icons in Liturgy and Prayer* Michael Evdokimov, (“Lumieres d’Orient,”

Droguet & Ardant, Paris) Translation and Introduction by Robert Smith, F.S.C. 1997, introduction 2004, Paulist Press, 997 Macarthur Blvd. Mahwah, NJ 07430 USA; ISBN 0-8091-4278-3 L of C No: BX376.3 .E93 2003 and Dewey 246'.53-dc21 (This is an example of any icon book is useful. This one has a useful introduction from a Roman Catholic perspective, explaining some of the differences in present attitudes, and icons in prayer. The plates inside are very well focused; though a little dark. This book was found in a local Catholic bookstore.)

Various pamphlets from the Cleveland Museum of Art: If you can, go see their extensive early Christian and Medieval art, especially the illuminations, textiles, reliquaries, early statues, etc...

*The Book of Kells Art - Origins - History* by Iain Zaczek, 1997 Parkgate Books Ltd. ISBN 1-85585-312-4 (There must be hundreds of books out on "The Book of Kells," some on CD. Most do not have the complete book of Kells, but some carpet pages, decorations, etc., and this is an example. When buying a book on the Book of Kells, look for larger books with photographs that are in focus. No matter what tradition you paint in, the use of traditional color and unsurpassed painting technique in the Book of Kells is worth seeing. This book gives some insight into techniques of using vellum, etc., and with its details, one could produce at least scrolls.)

*The Book of Kells*, Described by Sir Edward Sullivan, Bart. With additional commentary from An Enquiry into the Art of the Illuminated Manuscripts of the Middle Ages by Johan Adolf Bruun, 1986 Studio Editions Ltd., Princess House, 50 Eastcastle St., London, WIN 7AP, England ISBN 1-85170-035-8 (cased) ISBN 1-85170-196-6 (paperback) (Another large edition, with essays on Medieval Illumination. Again, not the complete Book of Kells, but some illuminations.)

*Romanesque Painting*, Joseph Pichard, Heron Books, London. From a series edited by Claude Schaeffner, Translated by Anthony Rhodes, 1965. (No ISBN in my edition.) (Mostly 11<sup>th</sup> century primitive style icons in Europe, with history, maps, glossary, etc. On page 21 are four eighth century icons from Irish manuscripts from the library at St. Gall; including a naked Baptism of Christ, a carpet page, St. Mark the Evangelist with symbols, and one of the best Crucifixion icons I have seen; although abstract, combining symbols with an almost "cubist" or "expressionist" image of knot-work flesh. None of these four Irish icons are as primitive as most in the rest of the book. All of the icons of this book have a great use of color, design, and Medieval technique, however, compare most of these icons to the icons found in *Paintings of the Dark Church* from Cappadocia of the same period, and the European Romanesque icons look like they were painted by what would not pass for an apprentice in the East.)

*The Decorative Art of Russia*, Introduction by Marina Bowater, 1990, Portland House, distributed by Crown Publishers Inc., 225 Park Ave South, NY NY 10003, previously published in 1887 as *Slavonic and Eastern Ornamentation*, under the authority of his Majesty Emperor Alexander II. ISBN 0-517-01774-1 (Early Medieval to modern decorations, mostly on illuminated manuscripts. Everything is well labeled, but not indexed as to subject. The early perhaps Scythian influence looks like Irish knot-work. Some Russians do claim that Irish helped with early missions there; or maybe the Irish were influenced by Scythians, or maybe the Irish and all the Celts were Scythians. "Scotia" is a Latin word meaning from the dark lands, but

According to the book, *After the Flood* by Bill Cooper, in Chapter 8 entitled, “The Descent of the Irish Celtic Kings,” he says, “The early Irish chroniclers were most emphatic in their insistence that the Irish were of Scythian stock... Brewer tells us: ‘Scot (is) the same as Scythian in etymology; the root of both is Sct. The Greeks had no c, and would change t into th making the root skth, and by adding a phonetic vowel we get Skuthai (Scythians), and Skodiai (Skoths). The Welsh disliked s at the beginning of a word, and would change it to ys; they would also change c or k to g, and th to d; whence the Welsh root would be Ysgd, and Skuth or Skoth would become ysgod. Once more, the Saxons would cut off the Welsh y, and change the g back again to c, and the d to t, converting the Ysgod to Scot.’” (Copyright 1995 by Bill Cooper. Mailing Address: Bill Cooper, Creation Science Movement, Box 888, Portsmouth PO6 2YD, UK, Internet edition: <http://www.ldolphin.org/cooper/> There are many such books that take a few words and derive an entire system, valid or invalid. Bill Cooper uses some pre-Christian Irish sources. I have also seen some authors stretch Gaelic words to say that they were all Hebrew, using a different line of reasoning.) However, others also say that the Irish and Scythians have the same origin: see [http://www.fantompowa.net/Flame/khazar\\_history.htm](http://www.fantompowa.net/Flame/khazar_history.htm) claiming that the Scythians were the common ancestors of many of the Indo-European peoples. I have seen Viking personnas also claim the knot-work style, but the terms for Russian, Swedish, and Irish royalty, i.e., Russ and Rorick, are the same in all three groups, long before the later Viking invasions of the 800ds.

*Angelico*, by John Pope-Hennessy, Becocci Editore, Firenze (or Florence). ISBN 0-935748-23-7 USA Pbk. Copyright 1981 by Scala, Istituto Fotografico Editoriale, Firenze, text 1974 John Pope-Hennessy Printed and bound in Italy by Officine Grafiche Firenze, 1981 (Fra Angelico or Beata Angelico, or Fra Giovanni da Fiesole, was born in 1387, received the Dominican habit in 1407, and died in February 1455. His work shows Italian perspective and other innovations, which became popular in Europe around that time, but keeps some of the older symbolic traditions. Eastern iconographers would say that the innovations do not convey divine grace because some of the symbols are missing or pushed off to the distance, with central figures sometimes not centered; these icons are not well focused or balanced as compositions. But, Fra Angelico worked to try to convey the much earlier sympathetic style. Also recommended are the works of Giotto, Della Robia, and many others, some of whom were better in composition.)

*An Iconographer's Patternbook: The Stroganov Tradition* Translated & Edited by Fr. Christopher P. Kelley (Stroganov Podlinnik), (First published in Moscow in 1869 from a manuscript that is now lost, from the Stroganov family, patrons of ikon painters around 1600. One saint is not included in the book who was canonized in 1606, so the manuscript is dated prior to that time. This book has outline sketches of many Saints, offering traditional Medieval “cartoons” of icons, which are useful to anybody who wants to paint in this style.) 1992, Oakwood Publications, 3827 Bluff St. Torrance, CA 90505; ISBN: 0-9618545-3-7 L of C No: 88-061213

*The 'Painter's Manual' of Dionysius of Fournas* An English translation, with Commentary, of cod. gr. 708 in the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library, Leningrad [St. Petersburg], by Paul Hetherington, 1974 The Sagittarius Press, London, UK, reprinted 1981 with revisions Sagittarius Press 78 Redesdale Gardens, Isleworth, Middlesex TW7 5JD, England (“Dionysius was born about 1670, son of Panagiotos Chalkia, a priest of the village of Fournas in the district of Agrapha

in central Greece. He was orphaned as a child, and went to Istanbul at the age of 12, presumably in order to complete his education. When he was sixteen he went to Mount Athos [island of monasteries and many iconographers], and from the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century became established as a painter..." Although the manual is later than the Medieval period, the strict Medieval tradition it gives is earlier in style than, say, Fra. Angelico who lived in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Florence. This manual is a carefully researched Medieval history, and does not add any later innovations. It describes in words every shape, color, pose, calligraphy, placement of people and objects, in icons for most if not all subjects. This book especially is a "must have" for iconographers.)

*The Craftsman's Handbook*, Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, Translated by Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. ("Il Libro dell'Arte"), 1933 and 1960 by Yale University Press, General Publishing Company, Ltd., Canada. Dover edition first published 1954. Dover Publications, Inc. 180 Varick St. New York, NY 10014 Dewey No: 486-20054-X L of C No:54-3194 no ISBN given on my edition. (How to paint, gild, etc. in Medieval manner. Many very useful tips for many techniques, however, not thorough enough for egg yolk separation in egg tempera; see below for the technique that won't break an icon.)

*Artists Beware, The Hazards in Working with All Art and Craft Materials, and the Precautions Every Artist and Photographer Should Take.* Michael C.I.H. McCann Ph.D. Paperback: 576 pages ; Publisher: The Lyons Press; 2nd edition (April 1, 2001) ISBN: 1585742112 (Many pigments are deadly over time, and should not be used. Be informed and save your family's lives. "Is your art killing you? Artist Beware may well be the most important book an artist can own or that art instructors can recommend to their students. It is a thorough and highly detailed examination of the hazards of working with art and craft materials, and of the precautions one should take to assure good health and safety." Available in a less expensive edition through Amazon.com.)

"The Blessing of Icons" (pamphlet) Trans. Mother Thekla, 1983, The Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Assumption, Normanby, Whitby, North Yorkshire. YO22 4PS Printed by Abbey Press (Whitby), 4/5 Grape Lane, Whitby, N. Yorks. ISBN 0-903455-29-3 (After they are completed, icons should be blessed, and this pamphlet offers some examples.)

### The Meaning of the Symbols in Icons:

Icons are not without meaning. Their symbols offer many ideas, more than only the shape of figures, places and decorations, which are only the first layer, or historical context. The other three layers of meaning that may be revealed in an icon are described under the meaning of clothing: allegorical, anagogical, tropological. Icons are "windows," greater than their designs.

Halo: an "aura" of light around the head of Christ or a Saint. It is circular and faces front (drawn with a compass), not sideways or half sideways as a flat dish-hat (a Western affectation caused by trying to put a flat halo on a statue). The halo was once used to show emperors or important persons; and later used in religious art to show heavenly uncreated light or importance. Patriarchs and Prophets are depicted with halos as in a Deesis or in the Resurrection icon, but

other Old Testament figures sometimes have cloth on their heads, showing their dedication to the Law.

Mandorla: A large circular halo or nimbus around the entire body of Christ or a Saint, often seen in earlier Greek icons. Rays of gold may extend through the mandorla from the center, and it may be surrounded by a ring of stars, or a rainbow effect. It may also be shaped as a vesica, that is, lense shaped: ( ), in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The mandorla shows an aura of holiness, not just importance. Often it has a dark blue background, again, like the dark circle of the Father, showing that this holiness has an effect on others, but may not be seen physically. Sometimes it is only a faint circular line around a figure, as in some Pantocrator icons of Christ within a Deesis (prayer) icon. (Notice the term “mandala,” a circular pattern from the far east, is similar to this term.)

Gold or silver “clad” icons, usually of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Halos, frames, and sometimes the entire background and clothes have a heavy gold layer over them. Usually the icons are completely painted first, and then later some patron has part of the icon covered. The gold, because it is very thick, is usually highly decorated. (I personally am not fond of this style, but some later works of Della Robbia in Florence used decorative ceramic frames to compliment the interior compositions.) Sometimes there are pearls or other gems placed into the background. Such icons are more likely to take a walk and not return because of the heavy gold or gems, but sometimes one cannot prevent a patron from having an icon clad; the style only works if the decoration compliments rather than detracts from the painted portion of the icon.

Clothing: Not only symbolizes the Law, but also has a deeper meaning. The First Conference of Abbot Nesteros to John Cassian, Chapter VIII, “...practical knowledge is distributed among many subjects and interests, but theoretical is divided into two parts, i.e., the historical interpretation and the spiritual sense. Whence also Solomon when he had summed up the manifold grace of the Church, added, [Prov 31:21] ‘for all who are with her are clothed with double garments.’ But of spiritual knowledge there are three kinds, tropological, allegorical, anagogical, of which we read as follows in Proverbs: [22:20] ‘But do you describe these things to yourself in three ways according to the largeness of your heart.’” And therefore, the folds of the cloth in icons show these parts of spiritual insight unified into the garment. These are Latin terms, and Nesteros describes them more completely than I have space for: that allegorical finds parallels in events; anagogical is more prophetic; and tropological offers moral internal explanation so that we find a representation of a problem in the soul of a person. Abbot Nesteros continues: “...And so these four [including historical] previously mentioned figures coalesce, if we desire, into one subject, so that the same Jerusalem can be taken in four senses: historically as the city of the Jews; allegorically as the Church of Christ, anagogically as the heavenly city of God which is the mother of us all, tropologically as the soul of man, which is frequently subject to praise or blame from the Lord under this title...” According to Abbot Nesteros, these four terms may also be interpreted as: knowledge, doctrine, prophecy, or revelation (which he lists in a different order).

(Modern dictionaries do not define these terms well at all, are completely confused as to their use, or at best do not describe their use completely, and seem unaware that there might be any difference between them, or what idioms of Greek and Latin they actually might be derived from. But, what can one expect when rhetoric and meaning are no longer considered important

in universities! From the Random House Compact Unabridged Dictionary, 1996: “Allegory 1. A representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms; figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another. 2. A symbolical narrative... 3. Emblem from Latin and Greek: to speak so as to imply something other; originally meant to speak [allo] in the assembly [agora]. Anagoge 1. A spiritual interpretation or application or words, as of Scriptures 2. A form of allegorical interpretation of Scripture that seeks hidden meanings regarding the future life. From Latin, from Greek anagoge an uplifting, or an- before, and goge leading. Anagogic 1. Of or pertaining to an anagoge. 2. Psychol. Deriving from, pertaining to, or reflecting the moral or idealistic striving of the unconscious. [A modern interpretation, unknown in earlier times, but at least indicating that layers of meaning have come back into use for counseling somebody oppressed with faults, also called “psychotherapy.”] Tropology 1. The use of figurative language in speech or writing. 2. A treatise on figures of speech or tropes. 3. The use of a Scriptural text so as to give it a moral interpretation or significance apart from the direct meaning. From Latin and Greek. Greek tropos means turn or turning.)

Cloth means the law and also the curse, because clothing of skins was mentioned in Genesis 3:21 Before that time, the red clay, Adam, was the name of both Adam and Eve, Genesis 5:2, “He created them male and female; and blessed them: and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.” and therefore, if depicting Noah or an earlier Patriarch, they should have a slightly greater amount of red pigment in their skin. I saw an exhibit on baskets this year (2004) at the Museum of the American Indian (Customs House, New York), and one of the quotes from that exhibit said that some of the Native Americans believed that woven baskets were before time and symbolize eternity, capable of carrying souls. Although clothing could be signs of Adam and Eve losing their innocence and leaving paradise (Genesis 3:7, 3:10-11, 3:21), the use of cloth and weaving always seems to indicate some kind of rational form of prayer (Genesis 4:26); is recorded as curtains for the tabernacle Exodus 35:23, 25, 35, Exodus 36:8-12, Exodus 38:9, 16, 18, 22; is recorded as vestment for a priest in Exodus 39:1-30, Leviticus 8:7-9; and as clothing for angels, as in St. Mark 16:5 “And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed with a white robe: and they were astonished.”

Indoors: instead of a roof, the walls will be present, with a cloth at the top of the icon draped between the walls. This indicates that the event takes place indoors.

Fringe is a life dedication, or indicating a state of prayer, or sometimes virginity.

Bishops and Apostles of earlier icons do not wear the “mitre” or head coverings usually. When a mitre is worn, it is not the Armenian “fish” pointed mitre, but usually the Byzantine crown style mitre which looks like a puffy hat with a small cross on top. And the hair is in the haircut, or “tonsure,” where all the hair is shaved in front of an imaginary line from ear to ear, thus shaving the hair of the front of the head. For this reason, many icons of fourth century Saints look half-bald. Sometimes a lock is left, as in the case of St. Basil, or sometimes “bangs” as though the front tonsure has grown out somewhat. The same tonsure is seen in most Byzantine icons including of St. Nicholas (who is thin, not “fat and jolly”), and is used by many others, including some far eastern cultures. This same tonsure is used in all Irish icons and the Book of Kells. Wilfred of York complained about the Irish tonsure, thinking that the “crown of thorns” haircut was more appropriate (leaving a circlet of hair around the entire crown of the head), but the Irish persisted in the older tonsure. “Tonsure is maintained once a month, on the last Thursday.” St. Maelruain of Tallaght, ninth century. St. Maelruain also said that nuns are to

let their hair grow back after the initial tonsure which would look like bangs, and that men are to grow beards, which was also required of Byzantine monks. (A monastic tonsure is not required of everybody, but may be used by lay persons; if a person does this particular tonsure, even a quarter of an inch or half a centimeter around the front of the face at the hairline, it tends to relieve tension headaches caused by weight of hair. These muscles at the front of the scalp, if tense, also lead to migraines).

Irish Bishops and earlier Old Testament Patriarchs may wear a “Rationale,” from Leviticus 8:8, which is a small rectangular piece worn on the chest from a chain. The Irish version has the words on one side Justice: Faith and Charity, and on the other side Judgment: Doctrine and Truth, and may have a small Deesis icon and gems. (The Old Testament Rationale has gems for the Twelve Tribes and the words “Doctrine and Truth.”) Byzantine Bishops of a much later era may wear three small round icons on their front, hanging from chains; earlier Bishops wear a Cross. What they wear is according to where they were from, etc. For example, in the case of the “Three Hierarchs,” the “Cappadocian Fathers,” Ss. Basil, Gregory Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom, depicted within one icon, all three were Bishops, and Gregory Nazianzus and John Chrysostom were both Patriarchs of Constantinople, but only John Chrysostom wears a Dalmatic, because he was originally from Antioch where this style was worn. This is also one of those icons where the likenesses of the faces of the Bishops is well known. (And none of them wears a head covering.) Some later icons in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Istanbul) had the wrong clothing, because they were painted after the iconoclastic controversy, and the earlier clothing styles had been forgotten there. But the earlier styles were preserved in other places. Renaissance icons in the west used Renaissance clothing because earlier forms were forgotten.

Symbols, crosses, or other icons may be on the clothing. Patterns on the cloth may be a sort of paisley, interlocking crosses, circles within circles, patterns that look like Damascus brocade for the Cappadocians, or knot-work for Irish or English, but usually is plain to show complex drapery, and then the folds of the cloth are emphasized with light over dark pigments.

#### Some symbols of Christ and the Saints:

Carrying a book or scroll: if open the words on it are from Scripture or the Saint’s own writing. Their right hand (on our left side) in a blessing pose (the pose spells the letters ICXC, Greek for Iesus Christos), or sometimes their hands gesture towards Christ. Sometimes the hands are raised up above the head in the “orans” pose of prayer, or sometimes out in a gesture of surprise. Usually wears the style of garments of their time and rank (see above).

Soldier Saints may wear armor; but anywhere within a Church do not carry their weapons, except the centurion in a Crucifixion scene.

A scene, such as for a Major Feast, includes several events that occurred around the same time. In Christmas icons, often the Christ child appears in the center on the lap of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and again off to the side being washed by a midwife within the same icon, etc.

#### Icons of the Trinity, Blessed Virgin Mary, other Saints, Feasts or events, etc.

The Trinity together, as three men eating dinner with Abraham, from Genesis chapter 18. Sometimes Abraham is out of the picture, as in the Rublev icon of the Holy Trinity. None of the Persons of the Holy Trinity have white hair or beards, and they have no signs or symbols to tell

who is who. It is the only icon that depicts the Father as a Person, because Abraham called the three together “Lord” not “Lords.” They sit around a square table, which usually has bread on it.

The Father. A dark circle in the upper center or a corner. The circle is dark, not light, beyond vision, and therefore only seen as a solid semi-circle at the top of the icon, the rest of the circle beyond the top of the icon. (It is not correct to picture the Father as a man. St. John 1:18 “No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Nor is it correct to show the Father as old and the Son as young: which one, after all, would be the “ancient of days” if the Holy Trinity is all together and present before the beginning of time? One Greek Priest we knew referred to an incorrect icon of the Trinity with the Father pictured as a man as “The Old Man, Junior, and Chicken Delight.” According to the Second Conference of Abbot Isaac in the Conferences of St. John Cassian, Chapters I through V, “We need not be surprised that a really simple man who had never received any instruction on the substance and nature of the Godhead could still be entangled and deceived by an error of simplicity and the habit of a long-standing mistake, and..., continue in the original error which is brought about, not as you suppose by a new illusion of the demons, but by the ignorance of the ancient heathen world, while in accordance with the custom of that erroneous notion, by which they used to worship devils formed in the figure of men, they even now think that the incomprehensible and ineffable glory of the true Deity should be worshiped under the limitations of some figure, as they believe that they can grasp and hold nothing if they have not some image set before them, which they can continually address while they are at their devotions, and which they can carry about in their mind and have always fixed before their eyes...” And Abbot Isaac quotes Romans 1:23, and Jeremiah 2:11. This makes Abbot Isaac seem like an iconoclast, but he is talking about the error of depicting the Father as a man; there were always images of Christ as man, which he goes on to describe in Chapter VI of the same Conference, where he talks about the Nativity of Christ and the Transfiguration. Notice some correlation between this meditation on the Father as a dark circle and the Buddhist Void or Shunyata; not an “unknown” God, but a God beyond comprehension or anthropomorphism.)

Holy Spirit: as a Dove within a dark circle and rays coming down, as seen in icons of the Baptism of Christ, and at Pentecost. Usually, there is also a dark semi-circle representing the Father at the top of the icon over the Dove. The Dove is near the center of the icon, and points downward to Christ, with wings stretched out equally on both sides. At Pentecost there are sometimes rays from the dove to the flames on top of the heads of the Apostles. There is no other sort of portrayal of the Holy Spirit, except as in the Trinity icon of Genesis 18, and there is no indication Who is the Holy Spirit in that icon.

Son: Adult or child. When adult, as a man with a beard, no gray hair. In most icons and seated on a throne as Almighty He wears green, red underneath. In Passion week He wears red with no undergarment, holding a reed and with a crown of thorns, but on the Cross either a small white loin-cloth or naked. At the Resurrection He is in full white garb. There is an outline Cross in red within the halo around His head, with the Greek letters in the cross: O Ω N (O ON, “On” as in “ontology.” These mean “the being” or “He Who Is”, from Exodus 3:14, and John 8:58.). Some early icons only have five circles within the arms of this cross, looking like Eucharistic Particles. The Greek letters, “IC XC,” the abbreviation for “Jesus Christ” are written on the icon near

Christ's face. All icons of Christ have these abbreviations, usually in red. (In a book, it is always possible to see if a page has been printed backwards in error, because the Greek language, like English, reads left to right.) As a child, the cloth is yellow or gold, with close folds depicting movement, and He is shown as older than newborn about the size of a two year old, except in a Nativity icon, where He is wrapped tightly in swaddling clothes and His face is not greatly visible. In the iconoclast era, in the West He is often depicted as a sacrificial lamb. In the East, in arguments over the iconoclastic controversy St. John of Damascus is paraphrased as saying that we have seen Him, and now can depict Him.

Some favorite icons of the Son:

The icon "made without hands" (Acheiropoietos), also called "the icon of the Lord on the cloth" (Mandilion), is just the face of Christ in a halo on a cloth, and also is called the "cloth of Edessa." The eyes are large, dilated, sad, compassionate. According to tradition, this is the icon of king Abgar of Edessa, who sent portrait painters to Christ, but were not able to paint Him, and therefore Christ sent the king a cloth that His face had appeared upon. (Implied in St. John 12:20-23.) There are two impressions of the "Face" on bricks, known as the "keramidia" which were made from this icon touching the bricks. The Mandilion is especially venerated on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the first Sunday in Lent, which commemorates the return of icons to the church in 787 A.D. after the iconoclastic controversy; this was one of the icons that was used as proof of the acceptability of icons because it was not made with hands. It was kept at Edessa until it was taken to Constantinople in 944. The "cloth of Edessa" was among the relics lost at the sacking of Constantinople by the Crusaders, and the Vatican claims to have it. A few years ago this icon toured, but the reliquary-icon is painted over so the cloth is not visible. It is a favorite theme of Byzantine Icons, and in the West a similar icon, "Veronica's veil" is a favorite. The name Veronica means *true* ("vera") *icon* ("icona"), and it was said by those traveling to Jerusalem in early centuries, recorded by early church historians, that she had a large statue of Christ in front of her house which people came to see. (Note: all icons painted flat imitate this icon somewhat. And icon painters are called "icon writers" or "iconographers," because outlines of figures were allowed as in the case of the cherubim depicted in brass in the temple. The color between the lines, put on in pools, is pushed around, but not with "brush strokes," and therefore the exact place the paint goes is "made without hands." Although there were many mosaics and a few statues, later than the iconoclastic controversy if icons were painted they were mostly painted in this technique. Sometimes light appears around icons, such as at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and this is also "without hands.") Since this icon is on a cloth, we can seek the four layers of meaning: historically it is the face of Jesus soon before the Passion, allegorically it is the Son of God who gives us His image on the cloth of our prayers, anagogically (prophetically) it is the Image of Christ seen on the cloth of the universe at the end of time, and tropologically (in our soul) it is the face of God in us and in everybody we see because all are made in the image of God, and that we should love our neighbor as ourselves.

Christ Almighty, or Pantocrator (Ruler of all). Usually in green over a gold or white undergarment, seated on a throne, facing front, holding a book and hand in blessing. Usually within a large mandorla around the whole body. He is borne on cherubims (see below). Often the center of a Deesis (prayer) icon. Some are in half-length (ending below the chest, without depicting the throne), and giant in size, for example, as mosaics or frescos in cupolas or domes.

Christ as teacher at age twelve: Sometimes used at “Mid-Pascha” or “Mid-Pentecost,” the Wednesday after the Third Sunday in Paschaltide. Christ is seated in the middle of a semi-circle of elders who both listen to him and some talk among themselves; He with His halo, the elders in the cloth of the Law.

Christ the Good Shepherd: This is one of the oldest themes in icons. A statue in the Cleveland museum of art from the third century shows this theme: Christ carries a sheep on His shoulders. His face is full of tenderness, but his figure shows large shoulders and a strong grip. He leans on a rough branch as a walking stick, not a later finished “shepherd’s crook.” There is a tree stump and other lambs at His feet. The tree stump with the lambs indicates that He has cut down the tree of those who presume to hold power (figuratively) and yet protects the lost sheep. There is no halo; but early statues did not have “dish-hat” halos. The Cleveland Museum of Art says this statue is from “Asia Minor, probably Phrygia (Central Turkey), about A.D. 270-280. Marble, 50.2 x 25.7 x 15.9 cm. John L. Severance fund 1965.241.” This is a small statue, but it is an example of an early sympathetic composition whose theme was not often used in the later Medieval period, until the Renaissance era. This is one of those icons that illustrate Parables and teachings rather than events. Walking around this statue, it is an excellent composition from every angle, equal to or surpassing Michaelangelo’s statues. [By itself worth a trip to the museum; the Cleveland museum is also full of Medieval art and illuminated manuscripts.]

Christ on the Cross: This icon has no red color mixed into the flesh tones in it, except blood that appears on the surface of the skin such as on hands, feet, down the face, and at the side. The body is elongated, and twisted, not comfortable, the face is sad and in pain, but not twisted into a grimace. There are examples of early icons including Irish that show Christ naked in some Baptism and Crucifixion icons, but usually iconographers depict a small cloth in these icons. (One child once asked me, “Why is Jesus wearing underwear?” A very good question.) One Irish icon in the library at St. Gall does not try to depict the human form of Christ, but shows the body in twisted knotwork, which looks more agonizing than the close-to-realistic icons. Often, such things as the spear, sponge, etc. are also in the icon, with centurions holding them up to Christ’s face, and some soldiers squat below throwing dice for the clothing which is on the ground or held. The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Apostle John are often standing below the Cross, looking at it in surprise and concern; too shocked to show all their sadness. Some icons show angels in the upper corners, also with expressions of shock, and the sun and moon appear faintly as though covered, not bright, sometimes depicted with faces in shock. In Russian icons, the lowest board is diagonal, indicating the good thief who went to heaven on one side and the bad thief who did not. On the sign above Jesus’ head are the letters in Greek: I N B I, or in Latin I N R I. Few icons have the Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, but if they did, the Hebrew would be I N M I (or right to left I M N I in Hebrew letters). The word that differs in these languages is “king”: in Greek “Basil,” in Latin “Rex,” and in Hebrew “Malik.” (I have seen some iconographers paint a “B” that almost looks like an “R,” or visa versa, because there is a tail on the Latin “R,” unlike the Greek letter “R.”) In some cases, the background is a very dark blue almost black. The only source of light in this icon appears to be the highlights on the flesh of Christ. Some icons that show a “Crucifixion scene” do not bother to darken the background, and in this case the mount of Calvary appears in dark ochres, with a very dark place underneath and the skull of Adam there (Golgotha means “place of the skull”). Adam’s skull is wider than later skulls, with a larger

mouth area, indicating that iconographers knew that skulls had changed over the centuries. The walls of Jerusalem are in the background, as this scene took place outside the city. Christ on the Cross without the rest of the icon is used in processional Crosses, which can be short Crosses on little platforms that are covered with flowers in Mid-Lent, or can be on long poles. An icon of this theme is on or just behind every altar. (This is also a layered meditation icon: Christ crucified, who goes outside the walls of convention and beyond the bounds of reason, who dies for the sins of the universe perpetually for eternity, who feeds us through one Sacrifice.)

The “Unnailing,” or “Pieta” icon. Christ lies dead, His head on the lap of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with St. Mary Magdalene and the other women looking on, with the Cross in the background. More than the Crucifixion, all the emotions of the women come out in a rush, and tears are visible. Often, St. Mary Magdalene, dressed in red, is standing, has her hands up and looks up to heaven in prayer or asking why. There is no red pigment in the flesh of Christ, but the surface wounds are dark red. His body lays horizontal with His head to the left of the icon, and with many symbols around. This icon is on the cloth known as the “Antimins” or literally, “instead of the Table,” which is on every altar of the Byzantine Rite. Similar to the “altar stone” found in the West; the antimins contains a relic. This icon is also known as the “Epitaphion,” and is taken in procession after the Ninth Hour (after the Unnailing after 3:00 P.M. or later) on Holy and Great Friday. From the ninth hour of that day from the Irish *Antiphonary of Bangor* (ninth century or earlier), “...Thou alone Who in that Hour, red as of Edom and of tint of the vesture of Bosrus due to the Cross, the Stamper in that great wine press, ascended unto heaven. To Whom the Angels and Archangels hastened, saying, Who is this Who rises colored like the vesture of Bosra? Who asking Thee, ‘Why is Thy vesture red?’ Thou responded, ‘I have stamped out the vintage and no man of the nations was with me.’ Truly, Savior, truly red is Thy body for us. Red is the blood of the Lamb: Thou hast washed Thy stole in wine: Thou hast washed Thy cloak in the blood of the Lamb; Thou Who art God alone, Crucified for us who for old prevarications were given over to death. He by whose wounds the innumerable wounds of the sins of all are healed...”

The Resurrection icon: Christ is not in red, but in white in this icon. (Although the vestments are red for the Priest on this Feast day.) Christ is within a large mandorla, at the tomb of Adam, holding Adam and Eve’s hands (they may be dressed in red) to forgive them and bring them out of Hades. Adam and Eve, and all the others are fully fleshed and clothed. Behind Adam and Eve, there are hundreds or thousands of others from the Old Testament, all in halos, coming with them. Another Resurrection icon is of the empty tomb and the Marys visiting; but in this case, Christ is not in the actual icon. Sometimes this icon shows cowering guards and an angel.

Blessed Virgin Mary: Usually depicted with Christ also in the frame somewhere. Her eyes sometimes have circles under them, as though she is holding back tears. Her veil (maphorion) is the royal purple, which is interpreted as a deep wine color, according to Irish and Byzantine icons. Late European icons show her in light “royal” blue, from the comment in Ezekiel 1:26, “And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, like the appearance of a sapphire stone...” In various places she is referred to as the throne of God, or the ark, and the burning bush, especially at St. Catherine’s Monastery at Mt. Sinai. Her head is

covered in a veil of the same color and layers of folds (look at examples), with an undergarment of contrasting color, usually green. The folds remind us of the four layers of meaning of clothing (see above): in this case that she is historical (and completely human) Mary, allegorically the Mother of God from His conception, anagogically (prophetically) symbolizes the church which is said to be the mother of us all, and tropologically (for our souls) reminds us, as the Medieval carol, “Nova, nova, Ave fit ex Eva,” that her willingness to take on her role has overcome the disobedience of Eve, and therefore after she died was brought into heaven. And, because she was brought to heaven, on her shoulders and forehead on her veil is a golden eight pointed star, for the “eighth day of creation,” the Resurrection. Some say these stars signify her virginity, but the fringe that is usually visible also is said to signify virginity. All icons of the Blessed Virgin Mary have the Greek abbreviation: MP ΘΥ near her face, for Mater Theou, meaning Mother of God, because she was the mother of the Son from the moment of His conception. (One Turkish guide book of Hagia Sophia, the “Great Church” of Constantinople or Istanbul, is incorrect in the description of the letters, not using the Greek letter “Th” but instead an “O.” They also reversed several icons in the book, but the book is worth having nonetheless, to see these mosaics, which are mostly sympathetic in style, but sad, more courtly than compassionate.)

Some icons of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

Our Lady of the Sign (from Isaiah 7:14) she is seated on a throne of Cherubim facing front, her arms raised about three quarters of the way up palms up or out, in the ancient pose of prayer called “orans” (found in many religions), surrounded by a large vesica or mandorla. Within her, inside another round mandorla that is more decorated, is the Christ child also facing front in a blessing pose. Six-winged flaming Cherubim support her. This is a favorite icon East and West, for example in the Cloisters in a Spanish apse; a fifth-century version is found in Bologna, in a museum. This same icon is shown within flames at St. Catherine’s monastery, which they say the burning bush symbolizes (Exodus 3:2) because she contained all the power of the universe when she was gestating Christ, but she was not burnt.

Hodigitria icon: The composition was first painted by St. Luke. She is seated with the young child Christ on her lap, with only half her figure showing. (Some say that she is standing, because the infant Christ rests on her left arm, not her lap.) The folds of her clothing are large and still, while the folds of His clothing show movement and light, and many layers of meaning; He is usually in gold cloth swaddling clothes, but not exactly the clothes of a small baby, held on her left arm (our right looking at the icon). The later the image, the more He is seated upright and the older He looks. Also, the later Byzantine icons are more and more detached and impassionate; in some the Blessed Virgin Mary almost seems to be a spectator at a distance, even though her Son is on her arm! The Hodigitria of Smolensk is attributed to an icon brought to Russia in 1101 by Anne of Greece the wife of St. Vladimir.

Mother of God of the Passion (Strastnaia): Sometimes small angels (not Cherubim, but figures with wings) are in the upper corners in the background of the Hodigitria icon, holding instruments of the Passion. This icon appeared especially in fourteenth century frescos in Serbia in the churches of Lesnovo and Konce. In one icon, the infant Christ turns towards one of the angels, and looks with surprise (which seems strange theologically, but that was the interpretation of one iconographer. Not all artists are equally versed in theology.)

“Sweet Kisser” (Panagia Glykofilousas) or “Loving-Kindness” (Umileniye or Eleousa from the Septuagint “Eleos” meaning mercy, as in “Eleison” or also anointing.). She is turned slightly and her head leans slightly to Christ. Christ is on her lap turned three-quarters to the front, and His lips brush her cheek. Although most icons have Christ supported on her left arm, in some of these, she supports Him on her right arm and faces the other way. Ouspensky and Lossky in *The Meaning of Icons* claim that this is a rare theme in Greek icons, but common in Russia. However, I have seen numerous examples, especially in Holy Cross Seminary Museum (Greek) in Brookline, MA, USA of Greek icons of the “Sweet-Kisser.” Lossky and Ouspensky give many theological insights into this icon: connecting the love with the pain and grief for her Son, the merciful heart that “burns for all creation” according to St. Isaac the Syrian. One of the “Sweet-Kisser” icons is the icon called the “Korsun” icon, from the Greek town of Korsun or Chersonesus in Crimea or Sebastopol near where St. Vladimir was said to be Baptized, and where all the icons of the “Sweet-Kisser” were derived from. The “Korsun” icon often has the outer garment of Christ slipped down, and the undergarment slightly embroidered.

The Vladimir Mother of God is one of those icons attributed to St. Luke. This was brought from Constantinople to Kiev in 1155. In this icon, she holds Christ on her right arm, and her left hand is flat, almost gesturing towards Christ (leaning the opposite way of most icons of her). This is one of those “Sweet-Kisser” icons. There are many icons attributed to St. Luke of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Greece, such as the “Tinos” icon, which was found buried more recently.

The Tolga icon is a “Sweet Kisser” icon where the other hand of Christ can be seen around her neck; even so, it is not as intimate as some “Sweet-Kisser” icons. These appeared around 1314 at the river Tolga near Yaroslavl.

Hodigitria Eleousa (the Merciful) also known as the Tichvine Mother of God, from 1383 Russia, is a variant of a Byzantine icon of the “sweet kisser.” The sole of Christ’s foot also shows in a casual pose. The body of the Blessed Virgin Mary is also turned, and her head is very slightly leaning towards Christ. Although He is not brushing her cheek, Christ is turned slightly towards her. This icon shows a return to much earlier more sympathetic icons, the beginning of the Renaissance in Russia.

Kazan Mother of God, from 1579 (after the “Treaty of Eternal Peace” that Tzar Ivan the Great made with the Khanate at the city of Kazan), is said to have been found buried in the ground by a young girl who had been visited in dreams. In this icon, the head of the virgin is not upright, but leans very much in towards Christ, but He is upright and facing forward with His right hand in an attitude of blessing. This is one of those “wonder-working icons” which have strange histories of being in places of political strife.

Mother of God enthroned (also called the Cypress Mother of God, or Pechersky Mother of God by the Russians). Now she is seated facing front, Christ is on her lap facing front, in an attitude of blessing, and two large angels are on either side of her. There are examples in the Cleveland Museum of Art: a tapestry from Egypt from the sixth century. “Slit and dovetailed tapestry weave; wool; 178.7 x 109.8 cm. Leonarc C Hanna Jr. Fund 1967.144.” Also, a carved plaque from Byzantium about 1050-1200 of ivory, “25.5 x 17.5 cm. Gift of J.H. Wade 1925.1293.”

In Feast day icons that include the Blessed Virgin Mary, such as Christmas, she is the central figure with Christ, but usually not larger than other people until much later in Europe.

St. John the Baptist: Dressed roughly, with hair rough. Sometimes symbols are included representing things he did or predicted: Wings symbolize that he was a messenger, not an anatomical feature (messenger is the meaning of the word “angel.”) The axe and fan symbolize his predictions. Sometimes his head is shown on a platter, to show how he died. In many icons, several events in a person’s life are shown at the same time.

Angels: They are also called “bodiless powers.” Wings mean that they are messengers, not an anatomical feature. Archangel Michael carries a spear for overthrowing Satan. Archangel Gabriel carries a lily for the Annunciation. There are different kinds of angels. The six-winged Cherubim (or Kerubim) support the Throne (not little babies with tiny wings; the Cherubim only show their faces facing outward, and the rest of their depiction is the six wings, usually in bright oranges); in Ezekiel, some of the Cherubim have four wings. The seven Archangels do appear as dignified older adults with wings, and each have their own symbols. They are not bearded, and have nothing to do with human concepts of gender, although they are somewhat masculine.

Four Evangelists (Gospel writers): These may be shown as men, or sometimes by four Kerubic angels that represent the message they bring, as prophesied by Ezekiel 1:6, 1:10-14; and Ezekiel 10:14 (with a slightly different list). Ezekiel 1:10, “And as for the likeness of their faces: there was the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right side of all the four: and the face of an ox, on the left side of all the four: and the face of an eagle over all the four.” These are assigned to the Gospel writers: St. Matthew, a man; St. Mark, a lion; St. Luke, a bull; and St. John, an eagle. These Kerubs were commonly used as icons on covers of Gospel books between the arms of a large Cross, and also around corners of churches, etc. The assignment of the Kerubic angels is described by St. Ambrose of Milan, and is read by Milanese and Irish at the “Traditio” or “Opening of the Ears” prayers on Palm Sunday with the first few verses of the beginning of each Gospel: “...Beloved Brethren, let us explain to you why each one has its particular image and why Matthew is represented by the figure of a man: It is because the beginning of Matthew's Gospel gives nothing except the birth of the Savior: he tells us of the unabridged order of the generations. ...Mark the Evangelist, bearing the figure of a Lion for the wilderness, begins saying “a voice crying in the wilderness prepare ye the way of the Lord.” Further it is because the unconquerable One rules. We find examples of the many aspects of this Lion which are found in the saying: Judah my son is a lion's whelp: of my seed, lying thou dost sleep like a lion as just like a lion cub, who will awaken Him? ...Luke, the Evangelist bears the aspect of a bull as his emblem: Our Savior is the Sacrifice and therefore Luke is compared to the bull. It is also because it contains the two horns of the two Testaments and the four feet of the four Gospels. ...John bears the likeness of an Eagle for he strives to the very heights. As David said of Christ: Thy youth shall be renewed like the Eagle's: it is Jesus Christ our Lord who rising from the dead ascends unto the Heavens whence soon, reigning he will come to us who hope that the Church may be glorified to spread new beginnings of Christian rule.”

Apostles: The Twelve include all the original Apostles except Judas Iscariot, and adding Matthias (also called Madian). St. Paul often appears in icons with St. Peter, and can appear by

himself. The Seventy-Two secondary Apostles are usually not depicted together, but as favorite individuals. For example, St. Mark and St. Luke were among “the Seventy,” as was St. Barnabas, St. James of the Knees Bishop of Jerusalem, St. Stephen, and many others.

Saints: Every Saint has some features that are described. Although we do not have photographs of them, some Saints have always looked the same in their icons, such as many of the Apostles. The Byzantine and Irish Saints have the classic hair style (tonsure) of the front of the head being shaved. Saints also wear prescribed colors, and often carry or wear symbols. They have halos around their heads. Most men wear beards; most women are veiled. (*The ‘Painter’s Manual’ of Dionysius of Fourna* has prescribed styles of hair, dress and colors for each of them.)

Deesis: An icon of prayer. Christ is seated facing us, and on His right (our left facing the center) is the Blessed Virgin Mary. On His left (our right facing the icon) is St. John the Baptist. Other Saints may be to the left or right of them. All the Saints face Christ, praying, or sometimes they are in frames or rondels but slightly facing Christ. If there are soldier-Saints, in this icon they do not bear arms, but they may be armored. Within a church, all the icons of the Saints may face a central icon of Christ, and even if separated by frames or on other walls, these are still within a Deesis. An early sixth century mosaic Deesis is in the arch over the Apse at St. Catherine’s monastery.

The “Deesis” is the central theme of the icon screen (“iconostasis”) that is between the nave and altar area of a Byzantine church. The iconostasis is new, no earlier than the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries in its present form, that is, in the form of a solid wall of icons between the altar area and the nave of a church. However, early Medieval churches both East and West used screens between nave and altar area, or low rails. Icons were around or behind the altar and other areas of a church. The earlier Jewish Temple had veils with images of the Cherubim between the nave and the holy of holies. On one website, the order of icons in a recent iconostasis, from the ceiling down, is listed: Patriarchs, Prophets, Liturgical Feasts, Deesis, Sovereign (St. John the Baptist and the Blessed Virgin Mary opposite the Royal Doors, and an icon of the main Feast or Saint of the Church, with other most favorite Saints of a Parish), and also the Royal Doors (from Alexander Boguslawski). Often, the Royal Doors have an image of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the Angel Gabriel, and the two other doors to the right and left of the royal doors about half-way down the wall have images of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

On another website, the history of the iconostasis and controversy about the wall of icons is discussed. “The basilica, on the contrary, was eminently suited for public worship. In the early 4th century, the basilica consisted of a long, timber roofed hall which terminated at one end in a apse elevated above the rest of the interior for the accommodation of public magistrates serving in their official capacities. Such a structure created sufficient interior space to meet the needs of the Church at that time and consequently it became the design of choice for many centuries.

“The basilica was easily adapted to the purposes of the new religion. It could be divided into three functional areas - 1) the narthex or entrance area in which the baptisms took place [or, a separate building could be built as a Baptistry], 2) the main part of the basilica, called the nave, for the accommodation of large numbers of worshippers, and 3) at the raised apse end the holy place or sanctuary, also called bema or chancel [and often commonly called the “altar area”], for the celebration of the Holy Mysteries. There is neither archeological evidence nor testimony from

the Church Fathers which would support the currently faddish notion in some quarters that clergy and people were a single entity or "community" justifying the elimination of distinctions between the two either functionally or structurally [one may disagree with this statement, but most churches larger than tiny oratories did divide the altar area from the rest of the church]. From earliest times in all of the ancient Churches the difference between the divine and the mundane, clergy and laity, was recognized and facilitated through real and symbolic barriers. That reality has been reiterated time and again through the traditional practices in church construction... [Although I would disagree that the clergy and laity were not considered one; otherwise one might arrive at the Manichean heresy of "Pneumatics" or spiritual people and "Sarkics" or cannon fodder which were expendable, especially in war. This is also reflective of the "Montanist" heresy of super-austere and judgmental attitudes which did become prevalent during the Medieval period.]

"In the ancient Byzantine churches and for several centuries thereafter the clergy and the people representing respectively heaven and earth were separated by a low wall about four feet high called a chancel screen. This was not a solid barrier such as the modern Russian iconostasis, but a low parapet set between taller, free-standing columns which carried an architrave at a higher level resting on top of the columns. At no time was there any attempt through use of this structure to exclude the faithful from a full view of the clergy celebrating the Holy Mysteries. On the contrary, the visual access through the chancel screen was actually improved by the elevated platform of the sanctuary which provided the faithful with a good view of the sacerdotal proceedings behind the screen. Not even in Emperor Justinian's Great Church, Hagia Sophia [in Constantinople, the largest church in the world before the rebuilding of St. Peter's in Rome by Michaelangelo], where the Emperor himself participated quasi-sacerdotally in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy [all kings and emperors were made Deacons in the anointing ceremony], was an attempt made to shield him from the eyes of the faithful. The chancel screen in the Great Church [Hagia Sophia] differed from the usual only in the fact that it enclosed the altar like a three-sided rectangle, i.e. the long side proceeded across the front of the altar and the two arms along each side. The use of the chancel screen continued in the churches of the Byzantine East for many centuries. Vestiges of the chancel screen can be seen today in many ancient Greek churches where the open spaces between the columns and between parapet and architrave, formerly open, were filled in with icons at a later time. Perhaps the best example of an extant chancel screen separating nave and sanctuary can be seen in the Basilica of St. Mark in Venice, Italy [built in Byzantine architecture]. Similarly the rood screens [rood means cross] still in existence in many old English churches served the same function. As precursor to the iconostasis, the chancel screen was often decorated with reliefs of Christ, the Virgin and the saints in the face of the parapet and later by icons attached to the parapet and/or placed on top of the architrave. Therewith began the evolution of the chancel screen to iconostasis, a journey of many centuries.

"The iconoclastic heresy of the 8th and 9th centuries rent the Eastern Church as no other. The Emperor had been persuaded that the popular cult of icons had degenerated into heathenish idol worship. From about 717 AD until 843 AD there reigned in Constantinople emperors known by the orthodox as iconoclasts (icon smashers) who forbade the pictorial representation of Christ, the Virgin and the saints. The imperial decree was not every where enforced. In outlying parts of the Empire and in many monasteries orthodox believers resisted the will of the emperor and his patriarchs. The Seventh Ecumenical Council was summoned to resolve the matter. The

supporters of the veneration of icons prevailed [in 787 A.D., and were readmitted, but not completely accepted yet]. On March 11, 843 the Empress Theodora led a solemn procession of the orthodox to celebrate the victory of the true faith over the philistines, an event which became an annual feast celebrated on the first Sunday of Great Lent and known as Sunday of Orthodoxy in the typikon of the Churches of the Byzantine liturgical tradition.

“With the restoration of orthodoxy, the veneration of icons grew in subsequent centuries and therewith the evolution of the chancel screen, which had served so well for the purpose intended, from a parapet into the iconostasis which we know today. Eventually the symbolic barrier between heaven and earth became the visibly impenetrable wall between clergy and people limiting the latter's opportunity to participate more fully in the celebration of the Divine Mysteries. In Holy Russia where this development raised the barrier from floor to ceiling, protests were heard, most notably from St. Nil Sorsky in the 17th century followed by St. John of Kronstadt in the 19th, but to no avail. So formidable has this wall in Russia become, that, except for the Royal Doors, the uninformed would be hard put to imagine that there is anything going on behind it. [Note: the “Old Believers” sometimes do not have an altar area at all, limiting their liturgical worship to a non-Eucharistic service in front of a solid wall of icons. Therefore, this solid screen has served to distance the faithful from God, similar to the theology of Pelagius, Augustine, etc. See the “Eight Deadly Sins” class. Although the icons in an iconostasis are beautiful, sometimes they are too much of a good thing.]

“The latter day evolution of the chancel screen into the iconostasis as a solid wall is not without its detractors. Among the Orthodox and the Greek Catholics there is movement to render it less of an exclusionary barrier and to restore its symbolic function in the Divine Liturgy as the defining point between heaven and earth by opening it up sufficiently to allow the faithful a glimpse into the holy of holies and at the same time maintaining a barrier between nave and sanctuary. Thus many modern icon screens allow the faithful to view the celebration of the Holy Mysteries while reminding them effectively of their proper place in the liturgical scheme of things.” (Copyright 1998 to 2004 from the website of Epiphany Byzantine Catholic Church, Roswell, GA, USA. “Byzantine Catholic” means a Byzantine Rite Church under Roman jurisdiction instead of Byzantine jurisdiction.)

### Twelve major Feasts of the Byzantines.

Well, sort of kind of. Twelve just seems like a perfect number. On the western and Irish calendar, the Feasts of about Twelve Apostles (or thirteen if counting St. Paul) were the most important, but the Byzantines emphasized times in the life of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Some Feast dates are fixed, and some move according to weeks before or after Easter. The sort of “twelve” major Feasts are, in chronological order: The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, Entrance into the Temple as a child of the Blessed Virgin Mary Nov. 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup>; the Annunciation March 25<sup>th</sup> (which the Irish and earliest Scots said took place on the same day as the original Crucifixion, and therefore is often pictured over an altar with the Cross. The Byzantines say the Annunciation took place on the original date of Easter); the Nativity of Jesus Christ Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> (Christmas); Baptism of Christ and Epiphany Jan 6<sup>th</sup>; Presentation of Christ in the temple and purification of the Virgin Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>; Transfiguration July 26<sup>th</sup> (Irish) or Aug 6<sup>th</sup> (Byzantine); Entrance into Jerusalem at Palm Sunday one week before Easter; Last Supper also called Holy Thursday just before Easter; the fast day of Holy and Great Friday the day of the Crucifixion; The Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Easter) which is the most important and greatest

Feast, always Sunday, the date as determined by ancient calculations usually calculated differently between the Roman Patriarchate and all the Patriarchates of the Byzantines; the Ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven the Thursday forty days after Easter; Pentecost or the descent of the Holy Spirit Sunday or Monday about fifty days from Easter; the Dormition (Falling Asleep) and being taken to heaven of the Blessed Virgin Mary Aug. 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>, the Finding of the True Cross May 3<sup>rd</sup> (and in the East the exaltation on Sept. 14<sup>th</sup>), and the Dedication of the first church in Jerusalem which was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and remembering the Cross (because the Annunciation was originally on the same day as the Crucifixion) Sept. 15<sup>th</sup>, and therefore the date on which all churches are dedicated. Obviously there are more than Twelve Feasts.

(Of the Feasts above, the four that pertain to the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary were added to the Roman and Irish calendars by Pope Sergius who reigned 687-701, who had been born in Antioch and educated in Sicily probably by Greco-Siciliano: the Blessed Virgin Mary's Birth Sept 8<sup>th</sup>, Entrance into the Temple as a child Nov 21<sup>st</sup>, Presentation of Christ in the Temple (in the west called the "Purification of the Virgin") Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, and Dormition Aug 15<sup>th</sup>. Although Pope Sergius refused to sign the Quinesext council, that was not because the council allowed married clergy and yet put strictures against women attending church on certain days, but he refused to sign because that council did not allow missions to start in small churches without full equipment. Small mission churches had few icons and buildings, but without small missions, a larger community could not grow. As soon as the East adopted the Quinesext council, their mission work seemed to end, except in the case of the Rus of Kiev, who had to destroy a Greek colony to get the attention of the Patriarchate. The whole Christian Church never adopted Quinesext. Some of the dates instituted by Pope Sergius were already celebrated among the Irish, but on different days. For example, the Irish placed the Virgin's birthday in May, the Entrance into the Temple Nov 22<sup>nd</sup>, and the Dormition Aug. 16<sup>th</sup>.)

Even subtracting a couple, still there are major Feasts which the Byzantines and Irish celebrated that are omitted here, such as the Byzantine feast of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the Circumcision of Jesus eight days after Christmas January 1<sup>st</sup> which is also the "feast of fools" and animals, the Irish feast of the return of Jesus and family from Egypt January 11<sup>th</sup> (two years later); the Irish feast of the temptation of Christ and the overcoming of the devil February 15<sup>th</sup> (forty days after January 7<sup>th</sup>, and the end of the ancient "winter fast"), the conception of St. John the Baptist September 24<sup>th</sup> which places the time of incense in late September at the "high holy days" and therefore proves the time of Christmas; the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary with St. Elizabeth the mother of St. John the Baptist on April 1<sup>st</sup> (a few days after the Annunciation in Irish usage); the Nativity of St. John the Baptist June 24<sup>th</sup> which was exactly six months away from Christmas (St. John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease." which can also mean that the sun increases after the winter solstice), the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, a fast day, which was considered a day of judgment because he had no chance to forgive.

(This would make an interesting icon; Beheading of St. John the Baptist: new calendar date: August 29<sup>th</sup>, and old calendar date which has the fixed days thirteen days after the other calendar: September 11<sup>th</sup>. From the ninth century commentary from the Speckled Book, the verses of Oengus for every day of the year, listing visions of several saints [of course, for "Erin" one must read a city of many Irish]: "In vengeance for the killing of John comes the Besom out of Fanait [translator Whitley Stoke's note: See as to this O'Curry's *Lectures*, pp. 421,423,426,428, and cf. Scopabo eam in scopa terens, Proph. Isaiae xiv. 23.] to expurgate

Ireland at the end of the world, as Aileran of the Wisdom foretold, and Colum cille, i.e. at terce [around 9:00 A.M.] precisely will come the Besom out of Fanait, ut dixit Colum cille: 'Like the grazing of two horses in a yoke will be the diligence with which it will cleanse Erin.' Of the Besom Aileran said: 'Two alehouses shall be in one garth side by side. He who shall go out of one house into the other will find no one before him alive in the house he will enter, and no one alive in the house from which he will go. Such will be the swiftness with which the Besom shall go out of Fanait.' Riagail said: 'Three days and three nights and a year will this plague be in Ireland. When a boat on Loch Rudraigi shall be clearly seen from the door of the refectory, then comes the Besom out of Fanait.' A Tuesday in spring [that is, a day of spring-like weather, because it is described as on the day of the beheading of St. John the Baptist], now, is the day of the week on which the Besom will come in vengeance for John's passion, as Moling said: On John's festival will come the onslaught, which will search Ireland from the south-east, a fierce dragon that will burn every one it can, without communion, without sacrifice, etc. [translator's note: see another copy from a Brussels MS in *Celt Zeitschr.* i. 455.]" This could be to "expurgate the Irish," or as St. John the Baptist acting as a herald. The two "ale-houses" are places of commerce in a city of the Irish on a Tuesday, September 11<sup>th</sup> in good weather, destroyed by a Besom or kind of dragon out of the southeast, described over eleven hundred years ago.)

Also important as major Feast days are days of Angels, Twelve Apostles, the four Evangelists, the Seventy-two lesser Apostles, a day for Patriarchs and Prophets, the Maccabees, New Fruits, favorite Saints, etc.

### The "Cloud of Witnesses"

The Irish in the Speckled Book of Oengus and also the Martyrology of Tallaght tended to say that a Major Feast of Saints was a day when many Martyrs were killed, not a day when one famous Saint was Martyred or whose life on earth ended. Also, every day had many Saints celebrated on it. Therefore, the later Medieval large Western Icons of the Last Judgment with hundreds or thousands of figures may have had a precedent in the important Feast days of several thousand Christians killed in a Roman arena, or calendar days with too many Saints to name easily. Example of one day: August 10<sup>th</sup> commentary from the Speckled Book of Oengus, "Of Laurence the Deacon, i.e. Laurentius archidiaconus Xipsti (sic) papae Romae fuit, et sub Decio passus est in Roma. With an army, i.e. seventy soldiers in number." [Note: this was an important Martyr Saint to the Celts, with Propers for his Feast day. The "seventy" could be an estimation of other Martyrs with him, or could refer to the Seventy-two secondary Apostles.] On August 10<sup>th</sup>, from *The Martyrology of Tallaght*: "Laurentius Archdeacon and Martyr in Rome and eleven men and thirteen virgins. Felicissimus; Zefanus [Stephen]; Crescentionis; Arcareus; Quirillus; Quintus; Geminus; Agapa; Perpetua; Petronilla; Crispina; Menella; Maria; Juliana; Innocentia; Terentia; Isiodora; Ostensa; Affra; Crescentia; Perpetua; Felicitatus; Portianus; Crestus and twenty eight others; Ciriacus; Ciriucus; Exsuperatus; Eugenius; Pastoris; Pontianus; Largus; Leocis; Leocipus; Sevus; Cassianus and thirty others; Anna (Hannah) mother of Samuel. Also: Blaani Bishop of Cenn Garad in Gallgoedil; Mael Ruain cum suis reliquiis sanctorum martirum et virginum ad Tamlachtain venit; Cummine Abbot of Druim Bo." Every day had many Saints listed.

### Some Symbols of the Major and Minor Feasts:

Many of the icons of the Feasts are very well known. A few notes: If Christ is depicted, He is in

the center of the icon. If the Blessed Virgin Mary holds the Christ child or appears in an icon alone, she is at the center of the icon.

At the birth of the Virgin Mary, St. Anne holds her.

The Entrance into the Temple of the Blessed Virgin Mary has her climbing the fifteen steps into the temple as a small child, being given to the temple by her elderly parents Ss. Joachim and Anna.

Scenes often have more than one event in them at once, such as the temptation of St. Joseph, visitation of shepherds, visitation of Magi, angels, star, etc. depicted within many Nativity icons. The Nativity icon shows a cave cut away, animals, etc. Some later icons show a house, especially at the visitation of the Magi. The star is not an astronomical event (even a “super-nova,” whatever that is, speaking in “Period”), but under the dark circle of the Father, and has rays coming from it. Sometimes the star is filled with angels; the descriptions of the star are similar to what might be called a “U.F.O.” today.

At the Baptism of Christ, there are two figures fleeing within the river, depicting the Jordan and the Red Sea that Moses and His people crossed. The river is blessed by Christ, not the other way around. The Father is in a dark circle, and out of that comes the dove, with three rays projected onto Christ’s head. St. John the Baptist stands at one side with his right hand on Christ’s head, and three angels stand at the other side.

At the Presentation, St. Simeon holds Christ, while others look on.

At the Annunciation, Mary is surprised at the Angel.

At the Entrance into Jerusalem, little children place the branches on the ground, while elders holding scrolls look on in distrust.

The traditional shape of the table at the Last Supper is round or square, and often Judas reaches across the table, while the “beloved disciple” (Apostle John) leans on Christ.

The Crucifixion, Unnailing, and Resurrection are described under icons of the Son.

The Ascension into Heaven often has the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Apostles, Christ within a mandorla, seated, and angels on either side of the mandorla.

At the Finding of the Cross is often a man raised from the dead.

Pentecost or the descent of the Holy Spirit shows the Twelve Apostles (with St. Matthias) seated in a semi-circle, with small flames on their heads, and an old man representing the universe in the center. (Some other forms of this icon are found; some include the Blessed Virgin Mary.)

The Transfiguration is a favorite theme among iconographers, especially at St. Catherine’s monastery at Mt. Sinai, where a large sixth-century mosaic of the Transfiguration is in the apse over the altar. It is also a favorite theme because of the revelation of light, and is discussed by monks, such as in the Conferences of St. John Cassian the Second Conference of Abbot Isaac on Prayer, Chapter VI. On a mountain, Ss. Peter, James, and John are cowering below Christ who is in white, with Moses and Elijah in upper corners. A round mandorla surrounds Christ and there is usually a large star and rays within and crossing to the outside of the mandorla as well. (New Calendar Irish date: July 26, Old Calendar Irish date: August 8. New Calendar Byzantine date August 6, Old Calendar Byzantine date: August 19.)

At the Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles and others are present, the Blessed Virgin Mary is prone in the center, and Christ takes her soul as a little child to heaven. Sometimes a hand of a man is on the bier (detached from the arm of the man), which was later restored to the man. The upper portion of a dark vesica contains angels, etc.

### Western European Twelve Apostles

When painting an icon of a Saint, it is traditional, around a central face or figure of a Saint, to have small frames of events in the life of the Saint, or sometimes their symbols. Although the Synaxarion of the Apostles, or their life, was dated as written in a late Greek dialect, their iconography can be more easily dated and the events in their lives could be traced by looking at early icons. The iconoclast controversy broke many eastern icons, but there may be some early icons hidden away in places such as St. Catherine's monastery that might show small pictures of lives of the Apostles around larger icons of them. This would be an interesting area of research; but, most subjects of icons are focused on the life of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, and a few favorites such as St. Nicholas, St. Stephen, St. George, etc. For example, it would be interesting to find the source of the life of St. Thomas in India, which is very similar to a Hindu revival period story that appears at the same era as the Greek language Synaxarion of the Apostles. There are some references to the lives of the Apostles in the Irish manuscripts of St. Oengus. Icons of Evangelists in the Book of Kells are typical of early European icons: rich in symbols. I will not put the Feast days of the Twelve Apostles here, because they are different on Byzantine, Irish, and Roman calendars; and then when reading the life of a Saint, often important dates such as their Martyrdom occurred on yet another date than Byzantines, Romans, or Irish celebrate them. However, I will mention some important symbols to Medieval Europeans: the "cockle shell," or scallop, is a symbol of St. James the Greater ("greater" only because he was older, this one is the son of Zebedee). A great pilgrimage took place (and still takes place) every year to the place in northern Spain, Compostella, that housed his relics.

[Note: everybody confuses the "Jameses." They are called "James," not "Jacob" in Europe because of the Gaelic pronunciation of the name, which stuck when Bibles were printed. The James called the Greater, one of the Twelve Apostles, was the Son of Zebedee and the brother of the Apostle John. The James called the Lesser was the son of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve Apostles. The James called "the Brother of the Lord" or "James the Righteous" or "James of the Knees" was a son of Joseph by Joseph's first marriage before St. Joseph was betrothed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, not one of the "Twelve" Apostles, but was one of the Seventy-two, and he later was the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

Marginal notes from *The Martyrology of Tallaght* from May 1<sup>st</sup>:

Though you be in ignorance  
of the wondrous renowned Jameses,  
I will reveal them to you, without baseness.  
I have studied them with full science.

James son of Cleophas and Mary  
chief of the noble high Apostles,

[of the noble Apostles, not "of the Twelve"]

suffered Martyrdom on the eighth of the calends of April [March 25<sup>th</sup>]  
'twas not only terrible, it was a fierce deed.

On the tenth of the calends of July, Alpheus' son, [June 22<sup>nd</sup>, one of the "Twelve"]  
fair James, with grace,  
after he had preached in Syria  
north in Persia he died.

James the distinguished son of Zebedee [One of the Twelve Apostles.]  
a chief Apostle of God's people,  
suffered Martyrdom on the eighth of the calends of August [July 25<sup>th</sup>]  
He was a head of counsel of this world. [Not this James, but James of the Knees.]

### Roman Stations of the Cross

These are quite late, almost not Medieval. From the Catholic Encyclopaedia: "It is noteworthy that St. Sylvia c. 380) says nothing about it in her 'Peregrinatio ad loca sancta', although she describes minutely every other religious exercise that she saw practiced there..." "At the monastery of San Stefano at Bologna a group of connected chapels were constructed as early as the fifth century, by St. Petronius, Bishop of Bologna, which were intended to represent the more important shrines of Jerusalem, and in consequence, this monastery became familiarly known as 'Hierusalem.' These may perhaps be regarded as the germ from which the Stations afterwards developed, though it is tolerably certain that nothing that we have before about the fifteenth century can strictly be called a Way of the Cross in the modern sense. Several travellers, it is true, who visited the Holy Land during the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, mention a 'Via Sacra,' i.e., a settled route along which pilgrims were conducted, but there is nothing in their accounts to identify this with the Via Crucis, as we understand it..." "With regard to the number of Stations it is not at all easy to determine how this came to be fixed at fourteen, for it seems to have varied considerably at different times and places. And, naturally, with varying numbers the incidents of the Passion commemorated also varied greatly. Wey's account, written in the middle of the fifteenth century, gives fourteen, but only five of these correspond with ours, and of the others, seven are only remotely connected with our Via Crucis: The house of Dives, the city gate through which Christ passed, the probatic pool, the Ecce Homo arch, the Blessed Virgin's school, and the houses of Herod and Simon the Pharisee." The modern fourteen Stations are: "1. Christ condemned to death; 2. the cross is laid upon him; 3. His first fall; 4. He meets His Blessed Mother; 5. Simon of Cyrene is made to bear the cross; 6. Christ's face is wiped by Veronica; 7. His second fall; 8. He meets the women of Jerusalem; 9. His third fall; 10. He is stripped of His garments; 11. His crucifixion; 12. His death on the cross; 13. His body is taken down from the cross; and 14. laid in the tomb."

Replacing icons of all the Feasts of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Twelve Apostles, and other favorite events and Saints with fourteen Stations of the Cross is a very late practice; in Medieval churches, those that did have Stations of the Cross or events of Holy and Great Friday also had other icons as well. Keeping a large church almost bare of icons to look like a new mission or a tiny oratory is also very late, and does not represent the spirit of showing that Christ came to earth and we can now depict Him. Although the earliest churches were not plastered with icons, they were not without them. Every Eastern Church has prominent Crosses, but they prefer to have scenes of the Passion and also many other subjects.

### The Last Judgment, the Twelve Apostles together, and other Western Themes

On the other hand, the West had a rich iconography, not only witnessed in Irish icons, but in many icons from all over Europe. Although Feasts of Christ were considered most important, the dates associated with “Twelve” major Feasts were the Feasts of the Twelve Apostles, and also St. Paul. Therefore, icons of the Twelve Apostles are common. The Last Judgment was also a favorite theme, not so much looking to the end of the world, but instead the difficulties of the soul in overcoming the temptations and sins of the world. In St. Catherine’s monastery in the Sinai, the icons by European Crusaders most often have either the temptations that are endured while climbing the ladder to heaven, or the Last Judgment. “St. John Climacus” (of the Ladder) composed a book about the difficulties of following the narrow way. St. John Climacus served at St. Catherine’s monastery, although the Irish claim a monk from “disert Thola” in Ireland (St. John Climacus was from Tola). At least, this was a favorite theme of Irish and Western iconographers.

### Styles of the Icons:

A sixth century icon still exists of Christ. The face is not lighted symmetrically, but naturally. It is a warm, realistic, detailed, masterful face. (See St. Catherine’s Monastery.) A small very early statue of the Good Shepherd shows a mastery of artistic composition as well as a mastery of face and body (at least equal to a Michaelangelo; at the Cleveland Museum of Art).

However, icons were also idealized versions of Christ and the Saints. In later icons of the ninth through thirteenth centuries, faces are exactly symmetrical in lighting, and use simpler eyes, sometimes austere expressions, etc. Although the Byzantines focused on Feasts, in the West an obsession about the Last Judgment was common. The Byzantines also had the iconoclasm controversy. Tenth and eleventh century Icons of Cappadocia were more sympathetic than European icons from the same period. See *Paintings of the Dark Church*.

### Decorations around icons and illuminations

Early Cappadocian decorations included every form they could think of: paisley, zig-zag, flowers, bead, pearl, cabuchon, Eucharistic patterns, circles within circles, but not knot-work. If they had seen the knot-work, they would certainly have used it with everything else.

To bead or knot to bead... The famous Irish knot-work is also seen in other art, often attributed to Scythians (See *The Decorative Art of Russia* comments). Some attribute it also to Viking art, because the Vikings used this art. It might have been early Celtic or Scandinavian: the early Irish attributed their royal family to a line of “Rus” or “Rorick” when tracing genealogy, the same name found in Sweden or Russia, but in this case, centuries before the Viking invasions of Lindisfarne and Iona. However, which came first... In every area where the Irish took their missions, especially in the Northumbrian territory under the Irish Colman and Cuthbert, and the Mercian territory under the Irish Jaruman, the Irish knot-work is present in abundance. The Russians claim that Irish monks helped with the early mission in Russia, and the knot-work decoration is there (although there might have been a common early heritage). But, furthermore, the Vikings were also the Normans, were allies and married in to the Byzantine Court, etc. “Norman” styles of art are well known. By the time of Henry VIII of England, knotwork was present in paintings, but this beautiful decorative style was used by any culture that happened to see it. Earlier Norman art is not as knotted as earlier Irish art; the earlier Norman art is more plainly Romanesque (see *Romanesque Painting*). I am personally more Viking in ancestry than

Irish, but, at the same time, I do believe that the Irish would not have spent so much time using a form of decoration that had come to them relatively recently in their history; the earliest Irish knot-work is present long before Viking raids.

But, I don't care who started it; the knot-work is wonderful, Medieval, and worth using for anybody. Where it came from is not as important as its meaning. Why only show a "cloud of unknowing" in a circle at the top of an icon, or the mandorla around Christ or great Saints? Why not show the decorations entwined in a continuous "chain of charity," as it was described in the Great Litany of St. Martin of Tours? (From the Lorrha-Stowe Missal.) The knot-work allows an intertwining of thought and art, a depicted "mobius strip" that helps to reveal the inside of a work. (Especially the Irish eighth century Crucifixion icon from the Library at St. Gall, which had been founded by St. Gall the disciple of St. Columbanus of Luxeuil and Bobbio, with the intertwined flesh of Christ... closer to modern expressionist art conveying motion and emotion. See *Romanesque Painting*.) Books on the spread of Christianity through Anglo-Saxon territories and the help of Irish missionaries include the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by the Venerable Bede, and also several books on the Irish Saints which include those who stayed in Ireland and many who went on missions through Scotland, England, and Europe; at this point there are several books. (And also: the book by Robert Pyle about Irish art and Old Irish Ogham writing in West Virginia, especially the very Irish "Chi-Rho" shape found in North America. For some reason, there is controversy about these findings too.)

### Iconoclasm Controversy

(See more under "iconostasis" above.) From the earliest times, artists claimed that they "wrote," not "painted" icons. The Ten Commandments allowed a person to write, but not paint, Exodus 20:4. Some icons were said to have appeared miraculously by themselves, or were painted as portraits by St. Luke, so these or copies of them were allowed.

Before the icon controversy, there were several controversies which were resolved, only to show up again when a new barbarian kings came to power. These were usually theological controversies that revolved around the Incarnation of Christ, God and man, and a side-effect argument of the controversies was whether or not we are allowed to show Christ as man. John Cassian, writing around 432 A.D., in *On the Incarnation Against Nestorius*, Book VII, Chapter IX, about Jacob in Genesis 32:30, "...I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.' What, I pray you, had he seen, for him to believe that he had seen God? Did God manifest Himself to him in the midst of thunder and lightning? Or when the heavens were opened, did the dazzling face of the Deity show itself to him? Most certainly not: but rather on the contrary he saw a man and acknowledged a God. O truly worthy of the name he received, as with the eyes of the soul rather than of the body he earned the honor of a title given by God! He saw a human form wrestling with him, and declared that he saw God..."

John Cassian did not quote Ezekiel 1:26, "...and upon the likeness of the appearance of a man above upon it." And, Isaiah 6:1-4, "...I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly..."

Of course, at the same time, St. John Cassian is most especially aware that the uncreated God is not pictured as a man, and in the Conferences with the desert fathers of Egypt, he writes of a monk who becomes upset because of this controversy. After the first of two discussions with Abbot Isaac on prayer, St. John Cassian was at Cellae, between the desert of Scete and the

Nitrian Valley, the monks there received “festal letters” or Epistles from Bishop Theophilus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, which were against the heresy of the Anthropomorphites. After much controversy, “finally, however, owing to the conciliatory firmness of Paphnutius, the great body of the monks was won over to a sounder and less materialistic view of the nature of the Godhead than had hitherto been prevalent among them.” From a Prolegomena on John Cassian, quoting Conference X the Second Conference of Abbot Isaac, chapters I to III. (This same conflict was resolved by the examination of the attitude towards icons in the later icon controversy; that we do not depict the Father, but we may depict the Son. And Abbot Isaac in chapter VI of that same conference talks about meditating on the image of Jesus Christ.)

Centuries later, around 717 A.D., at the influence of other religions in the East, the Byzantines outlawed icons, and they broke and destroyed very many, and killed anybody who supported icons. (“Iconoclasm” means literally to break icons.) Oddly enough, those actually living in Moslem territories such as Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, were able to still paint and talk about icons. Some of the writings of these authors began to influence those in Byzantium. St. John of Damascus and St. Theodore the Studite were the major writers. St. John of Damascus, in *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book IV, Chapter XVI, Concerning Images:

“But since some find fault with us for worshiping and honoring the image of our Savior and that of our Lady, and those, too of the rest of the saints and servants of Christ, let them remember that in the beginning God created man after His own image [Gen. 1:26]. On what grounds, then, do we show reverence to each other unless because we are made after God’s image? For as Basil, that much-versed expounder of divine things, says, the honor given to the image passes over to the prototype. [*On the Holy Spirit*, chapter 18.]. Now a prototype is that which is imaged, from which the derivative is obtained. Why was it that the Mosaic people honored on all hands the tabernacle which bore an image and type of heavenly things, or rather of the whole creation? God indeed said to Moses, ‘Look that thou make them after their pattern which was showed thee in the mount.’ [Exodus 25: 40, 26:1 and chapter 40, Jer 31:31-34, Heb 8:10-11, ] The Cherubim, too; which overshadow the mercy seat, are they not the work of men’s hands? [Ex 25:18] What, further, is the celebrated temple at Jerusalem? Is it not hand-made and fashioned by the skill of men? [I Kings chapter 8]

“Moreover the divine Scripture blames those who worship graven images, but also those who sacrifice to demons. The Greeks sacrificed and the Jews also sacrificed; but the Greeks to demons and the Jews to God. And the sacrifice of the Greeks was rejected and condemned, but the sacrifice of the just was very acceptable to God. For Noah sacrificed, and God smelled a sweet savor [Gen 8:21], receiving the fragrance of the right choice and good-will towards Him. And so the graven images of the Greeks, since they were images of deities, were rejected and forbidden.

“But besides this who can make an imitation of the invisible, incorporeal, unincircumscribed, formless God? Therefore to give form to the Deity is the height of folly and impiety. And hence it is that in the Old Testament the use of images was not common. But after God in His bowels of pity became in truth man for our salvation, not as He was seen by Abraham in the semblance of a man [Gen. chapter 18], nor as He was seen by the prophets, but in being truly man, and after He lived upon the earth and dwelt among men, worked miracles, suffered, was crucified, rose again and was taken back to Heaven, since all these actually took place and were seen by men, they were written for the remembrance and instruction of us who were not

alive at that time in order that though we saw not, we may still, hearing and believing, obtain the blessing of the Lord. But seeing that not every one has a knowledge of letters nor time for reading, the Fathers gave their sanction to depicting these events on images as being acts of great heroism, in order that they should form a concise memorial of them. Often, doubtless, when we have not the Lord's passion in mind and see the image of Christ's crucifixion, His saving passion is brought back to remembrance, and we fall down and worship not the material but that which is imaged: just as we do not worship the material of which the Gospels are made, nor the material of the Cross, but that which these typify. For wherein does the cross, that typifies the Lord, differ from a cross that does not do so? It is just the same also in the case of the Mother of the Lord. For the honor which we give to her is referred to Him Who was made of her incarnate. And similarly also the brave acts of holy men stir us up to be brave and to emulate the imitate their valor and to glorify God. For as we said, the honor that is given to the best of fellow-servants is a proof of good-will towards our common Lady, and the honor rendered to the image passes over to the prototype [Basil in 40 Martyrs, also in On the Holy Spirit chapter 27]. But this is an unwritten tradition, just as is also the worshiping towards the East and the worship of the Cross, and very many other similar things.

“A certain tale, too, is told, how that when Augarus [he means Abgarus] was king over the city of the Edessenes, he sent a portrait painter to paint a likeness of the Lord, and when the painter could not paint because of the brightness that shone from His countenance, the Lord Himself put a garment over His own divine and life-giving face and impressed on it an image of Himself and sent this to Augarus [Abgarus], to satisfy thus his desire. (See the description of the Mandilion under icons of the Son.)

“Moreover that the Apostles handed down much that was unwritten, Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, tells us in these words: ‘Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught of us, whether by word or by epistle.’ [2 Thess. 2:15]. And to the Corinthians [I Cor 11:2] he writes, ‘Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the traditions as I have delivered them to you.’”

Later writers boiled all this down to the paraphrased statement that since Christ was truly man we can depict him. In any case, in 787 A.D., icons were made legal again, taken in triumph out of hiding in a procession that still takes place on the first Sunday in Lent, but the icons were not fully re-admitted to the church until a few decades later in 843.

Meanwhile, back in Europe, the icons were not exactly broken, but they were not exactly in fashion either. The same controversies were present in Europe as in the East. In Europe, suddenly the Book of Revelation of St. John (also called the Apocalypse) was a popular source of icons, not because they thought the end of the world was coming (although the Vikings made things very difficult), but because there was a rich source of obscure symbols that could be used. Suddenly in the West, Christ was not often depicted as a man, but as the sacrificial Lamb from the Apocalypse. Some writers have thought that in this way, the West both avoided the iconoclastic controversy and also the arguments on the nature of Christ as God and man. Late Medieval ideas such as “nominalism,” or unbelief in either a name or the thing that the name represented, also influenced the kinds of icons painted. (Nominalism was also a way to duck out of controversy. Today, the term “whatever” is used in the same way to duck out of controversy.) If Christ's submitting to sacrifice is more important to an iconographer than Christ's life or Resurrection, then they will paint Christ as a Lamb, but the real Sacrifice of a man of free-will and Who Himself is Divine are not depicted. The Byzantines said that the “Lamb” image does

not depict the idea of humanity being redeemed. The human face of Christ grew more and more austere after the tenth century in both the East and West, as though the human were a mask of the divine, not fully human and fully divine. By the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, the icons had little warmth. Then, some warmth returned, but after the plagues of the fourteenth century, either artists capable of showing greater expression had died of the plague, or people retreated into a distant cold relationship with divinity, and the icons in Europe were very austere. Major Feast days of the West now showed a “cloud of witnesses,” or the many Saints of a day, or many Martyrs, and therefore the theme of a Last Judgment seemed more appropriate to them.

Icons were never supposed to be “invented,” but they were supposed to be inspired by strict tradition. In the Renaissance in Europe, a movement to return to more sympathetic faces and more natural poses began to come into fashion in Europe. This brought back life into the artistic style, but for the backgrounds and gestures, although a scene looked more real, the symbolism sometimes was missing or reversed. Central figures and compositions that unified a scene were sometimes not centered on the central theme. Older forms of dress were replaced by modern clothing of the era the icon was painted, and Saints who had always looked a certain way were replaced by any artist’s model chosen by a painter. “Perspective” also allowed a scene to look real, but the “other-worldly” quality drawing the eye to the front and interior light rather than to the distance often was gone. Light always painted over dark on the foreground reflecting light going out to the people in blessing was replaced by shadows, dark over light, leading to a distant or obscure “vanishing point” in perspective. The Christ child became fatter, and in spite of the fact that the Gospels says “wrapped in swaddling clothes,” suddenly many icons of the Christ child showed Him bare. Angels were no longer majestic Archangels or terrifying and many-winged Cherubim, but sometimes silly little babies. Traditional colors were also not used. Gestures were missing, or without meaning. New fantastic images, such as a chalice being held up to Christ’s side in a Crucifixion scene were produced (in spite of the fact that the guards historically would not have allowed such close proximity); in this case, the symbols replaced the historical reality instead of being unified with it in layers of meaning. Although some of the softer faces looked like earlier sixth century sympathetic icons, the rest of the icon confused or obscured the divine light in shadows, sometimes attempting to almost negate the divinity of Christ. The ideas of nominalism and over-simplification had obliterated the purpose of the icon.

In spite of all this, any icon that is successful is an icon that allows a person to pray to God, and therefore, some icons “written” in Renaissance or modern styles are still successful icons. An icon is not an object to pray to, but to remind us of God, and therefore it is seen as a window to the divine. This happens to be an idiom in French: the window is that through which one sees; or can be a means to enlightenment (in the French language version, the point of the film “The King of Hearts”). There has been, from Medieval to modern times, a great movement of silent monks who preferred visual meditation to verbal, often iconographers; often with focused meditations on the Feast of the Transfiguration, a favorite theme of St. Catherine’s monastery. Their iconography continues in the same form as it has throughout the Medieval era. It is as though, through their meditations, they appreciate the uncreated light. (The term hesychia means stillness in prayer, and a hesychast is a person who has this experience. St. John the Solitary, of the fifth century, “... spiritual prayer is more interior than the tongue, more deeply interiorized than anything on the lips, more interiorized than any words or vocal song. When someone prays this kind of prayer he has sunk deeper than all speech, and he stands where spiritual beings and angels are to be found; like them, he utters “holy” without any words...”)

### How to “Write” an Icon:

Do not use deadly pigments!!!!!! They affect you and everybody who lives in your house. Anything with cadmium in it. These are very bright colors, not used in the Medieval period anyway. If you want a bright red, you are better off with cheap watercolor red (such as “Prang”). Lead white should not be used. It is no brighter than zinc and titanium, which are safe. Do not use any colors that contain antimony, mercury, lead, cadmium. This includes cinnabar, mercury yellow, lead white, and any of the cadmiums. A simple brown, or burnt umber, chromium oxide, may cause lung damage. (Burnt Sienna mixed with a little black has a richer effect, and is much safer.) READ ALL LABELS ON MATERIALS. Some other colors still must be used with great caution. When you take minerals as dietary supplements, these are measured in “milligrams.” Powdered tempera pigment that gets into your nose or on your skin reaches toxic levels before you may be aware. Iron oxide is a preferred red, but iron is toxic in any quantity, and men store it in their liver and cannot get rid of it. Men of Mediterranean or African descent especially can get cirrhosis of the liver from iron in food alone. If you have any concerns, have your doctor test your liver function occasionally, which is more than the usual blood tests. Paint on the skin: When it happens, wash hands immediately with cool water, not warm. Throw away the water that the brushes are rinsed in often. Keep paper towels nearby and extra water containers: Do not use plastic pop-up tops on containers that contain any powdered pigment. When opened, a little bit of the pigments spray into the air, and you cannot help breathing them and getting them on your skin. Screw caps with rubber inner lids are useful. KEEP PIGMENTS OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN.

Diet: Using any pigments at all puts some strain on your liver. Traditionally, at least while “writing” icons, iconographers ate a strict “vegan” style diet: bread, water, vegetables, fruit, etc.; no alcohol, meat, eggs, fish, milk, cheese, or anything at all that would tax the liver, even tobacco or caffeinated beverages. An iconographer who is doing an extensive project, or who paints in tempera all the time, should stay on this diet. A Russian teacher of iconography once received a gift of vodka and caviar from his students. He gave the caviar away, and he used the vodka as an artist’s material. (I also take Milk Thistle, Latin name Silymarin, because the German pharmacopia lists it as cleansing the liver; this is not a prescription, or even suggested, but what I do. It is suggested to do your own research. Turmeric has some benefit on the liver as well.)

A diet of prayer while painting (I Thess. 5:17 “...without ceasing.”): If you seek to paint a peaceful scene, it helps to be peaceful. Such focus helps a great deal while painting. There is a tradition of non-verbal iconographer-monastics in the East.

Icons take many hours, days, and weeks to complete, because each step is long...

Steps: Preparing the board. A slight well may be carved into the front. Any other carving must be done before any painting. Then, the top, sides, and bottom, and especially the places where

the canvass will be applied must be well scored with a sharp knife, across the grain of the wood.

Glue (gelatin derived from fish or rabbit) must be dissolved in boiling water, and brushed onto the board: onto the front, frame edge, and sides. The only place where there won't be any glue is on the back. Let the glue dry, and put extra glue on the side edges where more will absorb. Cut the canvass slightly smaller than the well or flat surface on the board. Then the canvass is soaked in the glue, and applied to the board. Rub the canvass to get any air bubbles out, and to stretch it. Don't pay any attention to frayed edges. Keep pushing at the canvass until it is well stretched and stuck to the wood. If a stray thread comes off the cloth, just take it off. Don't let loose threads get underneath the canvass. The canvass must be a 100% natural fabric without dye; artist's canvass. When the canvass is completely dry (wait 24 hours), cut the frayed edges off with an exacto knife. Do not worry about scoring the wood further to cut the frayed fabric; the more scoring the better. Do not worry if it looks perfect, but... if there are any air bubbles, you will have to remove the canvass and start over.

Gesso is mixed with the same gelatin glue. It comes powdered. Wear a surgical mask while sanding it, to prevent serious lung disease. The gesso is heated with the glue over a double-boiler (pre-prepared, or mix your own), to the consistency of slightly thicker than heavy cream. Put it in a thin layer (but let it soak in) over the canvass to the edge of the board, on the sides, top and bottom. Only leave the back without gesso. After the gesso dries (overnight), it will look like the cloth, the edge of the cloth, etc. Sand the gesso until some of that cloth look comes off. Repeat putting layers of gesso on, and sanding the layers, until you do not see where the edge of the canvass was, and it does not look like cloth.

Transfer the cartoon of the icon onto the gesso. Gold leaf is less expensive per the amount used than some pigments, and gold leaf can be seen across a room (very useful). Wherever there is gold leaf required, apply red bole (dark red clay). This is applied like gesso: with gelatin glue and layers. Use fine sandpaper between layers. Burnish the bole with a burnishing stone so that it is very smooth and shiny. After the bole has been prepared, apply the gold leaf this way: A special glue, or "size" must be painted over the bole. Some modern or oriental sizes are very effective. Medieval "size" consists of garlic juice, with a few drops of ethanol alcohol (i.e., vodka or similar) to help extract the garlic. This is extremely sticky, and has a strong odor. Apply it quickly over the bole, being very careful to only paint the garlic juice over the areas where you want gold leaf. It will be tacky very quickly. Before it dries completely, put a sheet of gold leaf with paper backing over the area gently, and pull it up immediately. The gold leaf will leave the paper, and stick to the garlic. Repeat around the halo (or whatever). Edges of gold leaf will fly in the breeze; when it dries, pull these off with a dry brush. If you are careful, these can be used in another layer, but they crumple quickly. Places where the gold did not stick, or wherever the gold tore apart, can have another layer of garlic brushed on, and more gold applied. Thin gold leaf is porous, and can be applied in layers, but be careful not to put too many layers on it (and that does get expensive). If you find any truly expensive gold leaf in thicker layers, the Medieval style of burnishing complex lines into the gold can be achieved.

It is easy to paint over gold leaf, but not to put gold leaf over paint. The "mandorla" or great halo around the entire body of a Saint or Christ sometimes have gold lines running through it, such as

the Resurrection icon, or the mandorla around Christ in “Our Lady of the Sign.” This is easily achieved by gold leafing an area, and painting all the areas between the gold lines. Dark blues and red pigments have more yolk in them, and stay down. Traditionally, a red line was painted around the edge of the halo around the head. Irish also put designs into the halo of any Saint, in thin lines painted over the gold. Icons of Christ used a line cross within the halo, with the Greek letters: O Ω N in each arm of the cross (see symbols of the Son). The halo symbolized light; the “dish-hat” halo is incorrect, and came into use when some attempt at putting a halo on statues was made. To apply gold over paint (in a few cases, such as the eight pointed stars on the Blessed Virgin Mary, or fringe, etc.), then carefully paint the “size” on the exact location where the gold is to go, and quickly apply it. Then, you might need a knife to carefully remove some gold leaf that has stuck to paint. It may be better to apply the stars first, and then paint around them.

Paints: For exact ratios of egg to paint, layers of color for various colors, style of painting, etc., you should have a teacher. Suggestion: Gabriel Guild or Guild Mirondola have such teachers.

Some suggestions for success.

Know the meaning of the icon, and it will help you achieve the effect. Icons painted without knowing their meaning often look unfocused or dull. (Use detailed descriptions in books.)

Preparing egg yolk: If any egg white at all is in the mixture, the strong proteins will tighten as they dry, and can crack all your gesso and destroy the icon. It is necessary to have paper towels, and available clean running water. Carefully crack the egg yolk into the palm of the hand. Let all the egg white run off (into a bowl... make meringue cookies or something later). Carefully transfer the egg yolk into your other hand, washing the first hand and drying the hand with the paper towel, and letting more egg white come off the yolk. Then transfer the egg yolk back to the first hand, repeating this until the membrane of the yolk seems dry, the last step being to wash and dry the other hand. Then, over a very clean bowl, open the yolk membrane, and let the yolk run into the bowl, being careful that no membrane comes with it. Throw away the yolk membrane. Add about a quarter cup (2 oz.) of pure water (slightly more water than the volume of the egg yolk), and a teaspoon of white vinegar. (If you forget the vinegar, the mixture will smell like rotten eggs in a day, and the paint will not stay on the board.)

Powdered paint is combined with water and egg yolk mixture. Now, you can add drops of egg yolk mixture to various liquid pigment mixtures, and also to plain (pure) water for thinning medium. Dark blue and some red pigments need much more yolk mixture, almost no extra water, and the whites need very little, only several drops of yolk mixture. When a layer dries, if liquid pooled over it does not make the paint wash away, then there is enough yolk. If you add too much yolk mixture, the last finishing oil layer won't soak in, and the paint will crumble, but if you do not add enough yolk, the layers will not stay down, and they will wash away in the oil bath. If you do not have the benefit of a teacher, experiment on a small gessoed board with different mixtures, and after some layers are on, try applying the oil. However, such experimentation will not tell you immediately how the board may fare with time. (Don't use all the powder in pigment mixtures, only enough for a few days of painting. Keep paints that have been mixed with yolk in a cool place.) Then, the mixed pigment is also mixed in colors; no color

is applied as a single pigment. The mixed pigment is applied in little pools on the flat board; and then immediately a little plain egg and water are put on the edges of the pigments and the brush gently pushes the paint to corners of outlines. In this way, the pigment can be slightly thicker in some places where you want more highlights, but extremely thin at the edges. Let the pigment be uneven, it will look more natural. The use of pooling pigments allowed iconographers to say that they did not actually “paint” the icons, but that they only “wrote” where the pigments should go in the outlines, but the angels actually placed the location where the pigment would go. (And, many layers allow some control.)

Use books on icons to copy cartoons, colors, etc. Hands are the same length as faces. Feet usually turn out. Shoulders slope (not as natural shoulders). Copy styles of head coverings, etc.; if it does not seem natural, remember that an icon is idealized, not a portrait. Later icons (in the Medieval period) used exact mirror image in the faces, and fairly simple eyes. Icons are painted in many layers. If something looks wrong, paint more layers until it is right. If it is extremely wrong, you can scrape the paint off and start the area over, starting with the bottom layer. If the gesso cracks, you must start over. Icons are fragile, but more so before they are completed.

It is easiest to use thinner paint and paint with the board flat. (Fresco is another technique.)

Always paint backgrounds and clothing completely before starting the face.

Use natural pigments whenever possible, and the people will look alive.

You must outline the lines of the cartoon again and again, because the lines disappear under the paint. I prefer a mix of burnt sienna and black, because the brown umber is not safe.

Other than outlines, never ever put darker colors over lighter. (Do not put your candle under a bushel). Although a theological reason for this is given, the layers of pigment reflect light better this way, and even a small icon painted light over dark can be seen at a great distance away. A “shadow” does not exist in the case of Christ or a Saint. Instead, in darker areas, do not put the lightest layers on that area. Even a simple icon painted this way will look stunning.

The first layer is a color mixed with a darker color, later the colors are mixed with white.

For any skin tones, the first layer is a dark olive green, and the second layer a dark ochre with a little red pigment, and after that the skin moves through a mix of dark ochres to lighter ochres to lightest ochres mixed with white. Pool more pigment of lighter areas over the places where you want lighter colors, such as middle of fingers, cheek bones, noses, corners of noses, brow ridges, top of forehead, chin, collar bones, etc. Icons of Christ on the Cross have no red pigment at all in them. Otherwise, all icons of Christ and Saints have a very small amount of red in the form of iron oxide mixed into the pigment. The most iron oxide is in the icon of Christ as the Bridegroom, wearing the crown of thorns and cape on Holy and Great Friday. Also, a slight bit more red oxide may be put in the area of the lips. When painting the first background layer of skin, remember to cover the whole face including eyes, and remember any areas of feet, hands, etc. Paint outlines around eyes, eyebrows, etc., following the cartoon. Skin and eyes have the most layers in any icon.

Remember, natural skin is not one even tone. If pigment is uneven on the skin, it will look more natural. (Only magazines show skin that looks like it is painted on with cheap housepaint. Most acrylic has the same effect... if you use plastic, the people will look plastic.)

Eyes will look at you and follow you around the room if in the last layer of eyes the sclera (white) of the eyes has an equal amount of white pigment right next to the iris, and then draw the white to the corners with a little egg and water. (Do this in a couple of small layers until the eyes appear to look at you.) For this reason, eyes are painted last, because otherwise the eyes will appear to be staring at you, which is rather spooky, and also gives the iconographer too much of a sense of having “painted” instead of “writing” an icon. The irises are large usually in burnt Sienna, and pupils are black.

The background, sides and edges are painted; nothing is left as plain gesso. Sometimes another color is used for the frame edge. (Usually the back is left unpainted and un-gessoed.)

Some pigments do not come in powdered form, and some are not ground enough, and must be ground with a mortar and pestle. If the pigment is in water-based liquid, add some egg yolk, but you may not need more water. Warning: guaches look really nice in the tube, but they fade very quickly. You are better off with cheap Prang water colors if you use modern pigments, for example, for a thin red line around an edge of a background. If you collect clays for pigments, they must be sterilized, sifted, and pigments extracted. A clay that stains, such as Pennsic dirt, might make a good dark ochre after it has been purified. Vegetable dyes are usually not stable and long lasting, with some exceptions. Older icons, especially Irish, used less blue only because the color was so expensive, much more expensive than gold. However, blue was prized, and used wherever possible.

After the entire icon is completed: It is covered with sun-dried and thickened linseed oil (“oilefa”). A few companies make this such as Windsor-Newton, Grumbacher. The oil will change the colors ever so slightly: the only startling change is a very dark blue which will turn almost black after the oil. Otherwise, the oil looks totally natural. Put the bottle of linseed in a water bath and heat the mixture until the water is almost boiling. Watch it so the bottle does not tip over. Let the oil reduce and thicken till it is twice as thick, and like heavy syrup. When still boiling hot, with mits on (that you can use only for painting), pour a little onto the icon. The hot oil will absorb immediately, especially over the thickest layers, such as eyes and skin. Let it stand for a few minutes, and put more oil onto the icon. The paint will not come off. The oil should be a few degrees cooler, so very gently rub it around with a finger. (Not a brush or paper which will leave marks or fibers). If you could not use canvass against the wood, such as in the case of a very small icon or some small carved crosses, the oil tends to absorb much more, and you may have to watch this process much longer, re-applying and even re-heating the oil. (In the case of a blessing cross, eventually the entire surface should be oiled, which takes much longer.) Then, stand the icon upright, and let the excess oil run off (onto paper). Keep checking the icon in the next few minutes to see if the oil is absorbed too much into thicker layers, and gently rub more oil onto those areas. Don't set the icon on its back too long, or it might dry with too much oil over it. (We ruined an icon this way.) Make sure the frame area and sides also have oil. Turn the icon sideways, etc. so that the oil spreads around, putting more oil on. When a thin oil layer is on the whole thing (a shiny surface, not matte, but not behind very thick oil either), then leave the icon upright in a place where there is little dust to dry. Try to have it dry in the direct sunlight as much as possible. Complete drying may take up to a couple of weeks. Drying agent in the linseed oil is not recommended; not only because cobalt is a dangerous material, but it also

sometimes cracks the icon. If an icon develops problems after this time, you cannot re-touch it with water colors. However, in this case, a linseed oil based paint may be used, (mixing pigment directly into the thickened oil) but this is recommended only for emergencies. Icons may last for many centuries.

There. You have your icon. Now have it blessed. Notice that, whether you “wrote” a miniature icon or a giant altarpiece, the amount of time it took was about the same, because every step takes time to dry between layers. Your customers won’t think so. They will think that your miniature icon which took the greatest skill to pool the paint into tiny areas just took a few minutes, while that large wall piece that you painted with a large brush took weeks or months. They will pay you thousands of dollars for the paint-by-numbers altarpiece, but they will offer a paltry ten dollars for your prize miniature. Of course you only “wrote” your icon for the glory of God, but, if you intend to eat and feed your family as well, you might consider those larger commissions. It is best to practice on the small icons, because they do use less paint and gold leaf, even if they take as long to complete. At one church bazaar which lasted from Friday evening until late Sunday evening, my husband and I both “wrote” an icon as a demo, which we gave away at the end of the weekend. We started with a board that had already been gessoed, and we used only a painted halo. By the end of Sunday, one or the other of us working constantly, the icon was ready for the “oilefa,” which we did at home, and then of course we gave it away. We were able to determine that a very simple icon that is a bit rushed, without the steps of gesso, gold leaf, or oilefa, takes at least twenty- four working hours for tempera layers.

Care and feeding of icons: Do not allow people (or tell those you give the icon to not to allow people) to use any lipstick if they intend to kiss the icon. This will ruin the oil finish. Putting an icon behind glass is not recommended, unless you can’t enforce the no-lipstick rule. Be careful of swinging censers. Icons of St. Stephen somehow always get hit showing chips of exposed gesso. Dust the icons... they may be washed with water after the oil is completely dried (not soap). To keep dust off, some churches drape cloths over the tops of the icons. Dust comes from the ashes and smoke of the censers, as well as usual dust. Icons don’t mind temperature changes, but if you install an icon outdoors, put a little semi-roof over it so that most of the time rain doesn’t pour down it from top to bottom. (Remember, the modern environment has acid rain.) An outdoor icon of this kind was over the entrance to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia on 93<sup>rd</sup> Street in Manhattan, and the icon showed no signs of deterioration, even in the pollution. Glass will trap moisture; outdoor icons are better off with no glass. (If you use a lot of valuable looking materials, keep the icon indoors, just in case somebody wants to take the icon for a walk. Most icons that walk away do not return. One icon that walked away from a church in New York was returned, however, because Mr. Gotti and his friends were “concerned.” Sometimes outdoor icons are smashed, not by weather but by vandalism.) Icons in an icon screen (“iconostasis”) between the altar and nave may be painted flat, but installed separately into frames within the screen; in this case work with the wood worker or stone mason. (Such an arrangement with a solid “iconostasis” is 17<sup>th</sup> century or later.) Medieval Byzantine and Western European churches used only a few icons in a screen of this kind, see “iconostasis.” (If an icon must be painted upright, thicker paint and fewer layers are used, or it is done as a fresco or mosaic.) Icons do not mind candles near them, but icons do not make good torches. The Greek habit of laminating a cheap paper icon to a little board and then burning around the edges as

though it were an icon rescued from a church damaged by war is really really tacky. (On the other hand, some paper icons and even beeswax candles were indeed intact and not burned in the rubble of the Greek church of St. Nicholas in New York which was destroyed by the falling Trade Center.)

The “prettiness” of an icon does not determine its value: some icons work wonders, even those which are not of a “correct” style. (The artistic power of an icon is not determined by fine details in the faces or clothing. Some primitive style painting has more power than does frilly decorative art.) If an icon spontaneously weeps or exudes oil, let somebody know. Please don’t install secret squirt guns to do this, because such icons and their surroundings are examined very carefully for fraud. Weeping icons are not always a good thing; even if not found to be frauds, sometimes they signal impending troubles or wars. Oil exuding icons are also rare. In hot weather sometimes the linseed oil itself will liquify and run, this is normal and not miraculous; it does not count as oil-giving unless you can collect containers of oil, and then that oil multiplies by itself. Usually, an icon is used as a window into the Divine, enlightening through hesychast meditation rather than weeping or oil giving.