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John of Damascus
Collected Works



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The Collected Works of
JOHN OF DAMASCUS

(c. 675-749)



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John of Damascus (1911)
St. John Damascene (1913) by John Bonaventure O'Connor

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JOHN OF DAMASCUS



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Collected Works of John of Damascus



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The Translations



View of Damascus, Syria, by Franz Hogenberg, c. 1570 — John Damascene, born Yūḥana ibn Manṣūr ibn Sarjūn, was born and raised in Damascus in c. 675.



Damascus, today

Apologia against Those Who Decry Holy Images



Translated by Mary H. Allies, 1898

John was born in Damascus in c. 675 to a prominent Christian family, his father, Sarjun ibn Mansur, serving as an official of the early Umayyad Caliphate. His grandfather, Mansur ibn Sarjun, was a prominent Byzantine official of Damascus, who had been responsible for the taxes of the region during the reign of Emperor Heraclius and also served under Emperor Maurice. Young John was raised in Damascus and Christian folklore claims that during his adolescence he associated with the future Umayyad caliph Yazid I and the Taghlibi Christian court poet al-Akhtal. One source describes his father's desire for him to learn not only the books of the Muslims, but also those of the Greeks. From this it has been suggested that John may have grown up bilingual. In his works, he does reveal some knowledge of the Quran, which he criticises harshly.

Other sources describe his education in Damascus as having been conducted in accordance with the principles of Hellenic education, termed "secular" by one source and "classical Christian" by another. One account identifies his tutor as a monk by the name of Cosmas, who had been kidnapped by Arabs from his home in Sicily, and for whom John's father paid a great price. As a refugee from Italy, Cosmas brought with him the scholarly traditions of Latin Christianity. This learned tutor was said to have rivalled Pythagoras in arithmetic and Euclid in geometry.

John possibly had a career as a civil servant for the Caliph in Damascus before his ordination. He became a priest and monk at the Mar Saba monastery near Jerusalem. One source suggests John left Damascus to become a monk in c. 706, when al-Walid I increased the Islamicisation of the Caliphate's administration. This is uncertain, as Muslim sources only mention that his father Sarjun left the administration around this time and they fail to name John at all. During the next two decades, culminating in the Siege of Constantinople (717-718), the Umayyad Caliphate progressively occupied the borderlands of the Byzantine Empire. During this time, 'iconoclasm', a movement opposed to the veneration of icons, gained acceptance in the Byzantine court. In 726, despite the protests of Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, Emperor Leo III (who had forced his predecessor, Theodosius III, to abdicate and himself assumed the throne in 717 immediately before the great siege) issued his first edict against the veneration of images and their exhibition in public places.

John undertook a spirited defence of holy images in three separate publications. The earliest of these works, his *Apologia against Those Who Decry Holy Images* secured his reputation. He not only attacked the Byzantine emperor, but adopted a simplified style that allowed the controversy to be followed by the common people, stirring rebellion among the iconoclasts. Decades after his death, John's writings would play an important role during the Second Council of Nicaea (787), which convened to settle the icon dispute.

The following text is one of the earliest theological defences of the use of sacred images in Christian worship and is considered foundational for the theology of icons in the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic traditions. The treatise is structured in three discourses (apologies). Each addresses specific theological objections to icons and offers defences quoted from Scripture, the teachings of the Church Fathers and the Incarnation of Christ.

The key arguments can be summarised as:

- Defense of the Incarnation: John of Damascus argues that because God became visible in the person of Jesus Christ, it is legitimate to depict Him (the Son) in images. “When the Invisible One becomes visible to flesh, you may then draw a likeness of His form.” (I.8)
- Instructions on what images cannot be made: Damascene quotes the Bible, in which God says “no one may see me and live” in the Biblical Book of Exodus. John argues that “it is impossible to make an image of God who is incorporeal, invisible, immaterial and with neither shape nor circumscription nor apprehension.” (II.7)
- Separation of church and state: Damascene argues in II.12 that “it is not for emperors to legislate for the Church”, which was written in order to combat the iconoclast Leo III.
- Distinction between worship and veneration: Damascene draws a clear line between “latria” (Greek: “λατρεία”) — worship due to God alone — and “proskynesis” (“προσκύνησις”: veneration or honor), which can be offered to saints, relics, and icons. John argues that the bowing and veneration offered to the cross when displayed.
- Didactic purpose of icons: Icons are seen as a “book for the illiterate,” a visual means of teaching the truths of the Christian faith, especially in a largely non-literate society.



Saints John of Damascus and Cosmas, as depicted in the 'Menology of Basil II', early eleventh century

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Solidus of Leo III (c. 685-741), the first Byzantine emperor of the Isaurian dynasty from 717 until his death in 741. Leo put an end to the Twenty Years' Anarchy, a period of great instability in the Byzantine Empire between 695 and 717, marked by the rapid succession of several emperors to the throne, along with ending the continual defeats and territorial losses the Byzantines had suffered during the seventh century.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE



A TREATISE ON Images will not be out of place in a public, which is confusing the making of images with the making of idols. A great Christian of the eighth century found himself called upon to face an imperial Iconoclast. He would willingly have remained silent, but he would not bury his talent of eloquence. He brought it forth and witnessed to the teaching of the Church in language which present 'exciting scenes' in Anglican churches brings home in the most forcible way. Our English image breakers are in the camp of Leo the Isaurian, who in the eighth century waged war against holy images, on the plausible pretext that they withdrew honour from God. The seventh General Council condemned his assault, and it determined the different kinds of worship, using the Greek terms of *latreia* and *douleia*. The special champion of holy Images is St John Damascene, whose treatise is now published for the first time in English. Every article in the creed has its special defender. St John Damascene proclaims the Communion of Saints and the honour of God through His chosen and favoured servants. No part of Catholic belief is a vain word, nor can the true children of the Church say with their lips what they do not hold in their hearts. I believe in the Communion of Saints follows upon I believe in God, so that the enemies of the Saints are the enemies of God. This is the doctrine which St John Damascene traces back to the eternal ages before time was, in the divine *εἰκὼν* of the Father in the Person of the Son. God, the Son, is the Image by essence, and then He becomes a visible image or form in time, clothed in flesh and blood, showing us by His own example that our worship of God is through corporeal things. Again and again the Saint repeats that as we must not make an image of the Invisible God, so neither must we refuse to look upon the Son, His Image, first in eternity, and then Incarnate.

What are the consequences of rejecting divinely appointed images? Hopeless and heart-destroying doubt caused by the undue exaltation of humanity: in other words, creature, instead of divine, worship. We are so constituted that images we must have: our minds cannot reach God's throne without the help of corporeal things. Agnosticism has said it. We cannot love what we do not know, and is not God unknowable? Halting formularies say it when they point to matter, which God has glorified, as inglorious. And halting formularies lead to halting souls, and to the proclamation of the strange device that religious truth is of no consequence so long as men lead good lives.

The sermons on the Assumption were preached by the Saint in or about a.d. 727. According to Alban Butler, he had special reasons for honouring the Mother of God. By her intercession he regained the use of his strong right hand. It was a practical demonstration of Catholic teaching, We reach God most surely through those who love Him best, and thus the Protestant phrase, which expresses a purely Catholic thought 'straight to God,' is exemplified in the Communion of Saints. St John's language about the Θεοτοκῆ will astonish those who stigmatise the love of her as a 'Roman corruption.' The crowning triumph of the Assumption follows justly on the divine maternity. Her body was all pure, because her all holy (*παναγία*) soul made it the resting-place of our Lord. The Mother is so identified with the Son that her life is part of His. The tomb is not for her, and thus the writer of the eighth century bears full testimony to Catholic tradition.

All believers are at one in wishing to reach God; the question is one of detail. Which is the shortest road? St John Damascene speaks with the Church when he says it is through the glorification of matter in the Person of the Eternal Word. Either give matter its proper place, or take away matter which the Lord Himself has exalted, and we are no longer composite beings, but spirits ill at ease in a material world. Take away the King's army, and you uncrown the King Himself. Forget His Mother, and with her the connecting link between earth and heaven. Then we may be heathens once more, groping after the unknown God, and our latter state will be more appalling than the heathendom of old, before the light had appeared to illumine earth's dark places.

PART I. APOLOGIA OF ST JOHN DAMASCENE AGAINST THOSE WHO DECRY HOLY IMAGES.



WITH THE EVER-PRESENT conviction of my own unworthiness, I ought to have kept silence and confessed my shortcomings before God, but all things are good at the right time. I see the Church which God founded on the Apostles and Prophets, its corner-stone being Christ His Son, tossed on an angry sea, beaten by rushing waves, shaken and troubled by the assaults of evil spirits. I see rents in the seamless robe of Christ, which impious men have sought to part asunder, and His body cut into pieces, that is, the word of God and the ancient tradition of the Church. Therefore I have judged it unreasonable to keep silence and to hold my tongue, bearing in mind the Scripture warning:— ‘If thou withdrawest thyself, my soul shall not delight in thee,’ and ‘If thou seest the sword coming and dost not warn thy brother, I shall require his blood at thy hand.’ Fear, then, compelled me to speak; the truth was stronger than the majesty of kings. ‘I bore testimony to Thee before kings,’ I heard the royal¹ David saying, ‘and I was’ not ashamed. No, I was the more incited to speak. The King’s command is all powerful over his subjects. For few men have hitherto been found who, whilst recognising the power of the earthly king to come from above, have resisted his unlawful demands.

In the first place, grasping as a kind of pillar, or foundation, the teaching of the Church, which is our salvation, I have opened out its meaning, giving, as it were, the reins to a well-caparisoned charger.² For I look upon it as a great calamity that the Church, adorned with her great privileges and the holiest examples of saints in the past, should go back to the first rudiments, and fear where there is no fear. It is disastrous to suppose that the Church does not know God as He is, that she degenerates into idolatry, for if she declines from perfection in a single iota, it is as an enduring mark on a comely face, destroying by its unsightliness the beauty of the whole. A small thing is not small when it leads to something great, nor indeed is it a thing of no matter to give up the ancient tradition of the Church held by our forefathers, whose conduct we should observe, and whose faith we should imitate.

In the first place, then, before speaking to you, I beseech Almighty God, to whom all things lie open, who knows my small capacity and my genuine intention, to bless the words of my mouth, and to enable me to bridle my mind and direct it to Him, to walk in His presence straightly, not declining to a plausible right hand, nor knowing the left. Then I ask all God’s people, the chosen ones of His royal priesthood, with the holy shepherd of Christ’s orthodox flock, who represents in his own person Christ’s priesthood, to receive my treatise with kindness. They must not dwell on my unworthiness, nor seek for eloquence, for I am only too conscious of my shortcomings. They must consider the thoughts themselves. The kingdom of heaven is not in word but in deed. Conquest is not my object. I raise a hand which is fighting for the truth — a willing hand under the divine guidance. Relying, then, upon substantial truth as my auxiliary, I will enter on my subject matter.

I have taken heed to the words of Truth Himself:— ‘The Lord thy God is one.’ And ‘Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt serve Him only, and thou shalt not have strange gods.’ Again, ‘Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath’; and ‘Let them be all confounded that adore graven things.’ Again, ‘The gods that have not made heaven

and earth, let them perish.’ In this way God spoke of old to the patriarchs through the prophets, and lastly, through His only-begotten Son, on whose account He made the ages. He says, ‘This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou didst send.’ I believe in one God, the source of all things, without beginning, uncreated, immortal, everlasting, incomprehensible, bodiless, invisible, uncircumscribed,³ without form. I believe in one supersubstantial being, one divine Godhead in three entities, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and I adore Him alone with the worship of *latreia*. I adore one God, one Godhead but three Persons, God the Father, God the Son made flesh, and God the Holy Ghost, one God. I do not adore creation more than the Creator, but I adore the creature created as I am, adopting creation freely and spontaneously that He might elevate our nature and make us partakers of His divine nature. Together with my Lord and King I worship Him clothed in the flesh, not as if it were a garment or He constituted a fourth person of the Trinity — God forbid. That flesh is divine, and endures after its assumption. Human nature was not lost in the Godhead, but just as the Word made flesh remained the Word, so flesh became the Word remaining flesh, becoming, rather, one with the Word through union (*καθ’ ὑπόστασιν*). Therefore I venture to draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes through flesh and blood. I do not draw an image of the immortal Godhead. I paint the visible flesh of God, for it is impossible to represent a spirit (*ψυχή*), how much more God who gives breath to the spirit.

Now adversaries say: God’s commands to Moses the law-giver were, ‘Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and thou shalt worship him alone, and thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath.’

They err truly, not knowing the Scriptures, for the letter kills whilst the spirit quickens — not finding in the letter the hidden meaning. I could say to these people, with justice, He who taught you this would teach you the following. Listen to the law-giver’s interpretation in Deuteronomy: ‘And the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire. You heard the voice of His words, but you saw not any form at all.’ And shortly afterwards: ‘Keep your souls carefully. You saw not any similitude in the day that the Lord God spoke to you in Horeb from the midst of the fire, lest perhaps being deceived you might make you a graven similitude, or image of male and female, the similitude of any beasts that are upon the earth, or of birds that fly under heaven.’ And again, ‘Lest, perhaps, lifting up thy eyes to heaven, thou see the sun and the moon, and all the stars of heaven, and being deceived by error thou adore and serve them.’

You see the one thing to be aimed at is not to adore a created thing more than the Creator, nor to give the worship of *latreia* except to Him alone. By worship, consequently, He always understands the worship of *latreia*. For, again, He says: ‘Thou shalt not have strange gods other than Me. Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor any similitude. Thou shalt not adore them, and thou shalt not serve them, for I am the Lord thy God.’ And again, ‘Overthrow their altars, and break down their statues; burn their groves with fire, and break their idols in pieces. For thou shalt not adore a strange god.’ And a little further on: ‘Thou shalt not make to thyself gods of metal.’

You see that He forbids image-making on account of idolatry, and that it is impossible to make an image of the immeasurable, uncircumscribed, invisible God. You have not seen the likeness of Him, the Scripture says, and this was St Paul’s testimony as he stood in the midst of the Areopagus: ‘Being, therefore, the offspring of God, we must not suppose the divinity to be like unto gold, or silver, or stone, the graving of art, and device of man.’

These injunctions were given to the Jews on account of their proneness to idolatry. Now we, on the contrary, are no longer in leading strings. Speaking theologically, it is given to us to avoid superstitious error, to be with God in the knowledge of the truth, to worship God alone, to enjoy the fulness of His knowledge. We have passed the stage of infancy, and reached the perfection of manhood. We receive our habit of mind from God, and know what may be imaged and what may not. The Scripture says, 'You have not seen the likeness of Him.' What wisdom in the law-giver. How depict the invisible? How picture the inconceivable? How give expression to the limitless, the immeasurable, the invisible? How give a form to immensity? How paint immortality? How localise mystery? It is clear that when you contemplate God, who is a pure spirit, becoming man for your sake, you will be able to clothe Him with the human form. When the Invisible One becomes visible to flesh, you may then draw a likeness of His form. When He who is a pure spirit, without form or limit, immeasurable in the boundlessness of His own nature, existing as God, takes upon Himself the form of a servant in substance and in stature, and a body of flesh, then you may draw His likeness, and show it to anyone willing to contemplate it. Depict His ineffable condescension, His virginal birth, His baptism in the Jordan, His transfiguration on Thabor, His all-powerful sufferings, His death and miracles, the proofs of His Godhead, the deeds which He worked in the flesh through divine power, His saving Cross, His Sepulchre, and resurrection, and ascent into heaven. Give to it all the endurance of engraving and colour. Have no fear or anxiety; worship is not all of the same kind. Abraham worshipped the sons of Emmor, impious men in ignorance of God, when he bought the double cave for a tomb. Jacob worshipped his brother Esau and Pharaoh, the Egyptian, but on the point of his staff⁴ He worshipped, he did not adore. Josue and Daniel worshipped an angel of God; they did not adore him. The worship of *latreia* is one thing, and the worship which is given to merit another. Now, as we are talking of images and worship, let us analyse the exact meaning of each. An image is a likeness of the original with a certain difference, for it is not an exact reproduction of the original. Thus, the Son is the living, substantial, unchangeable Image of the invisible God, bearing in Himself the whole Father, being in all things equal to Him, differing only in being begotten by the Father, who is the Begetter; the Son is begotten. The Father does not proceed from the Son, but the Son from the Father. It is through the Son, though not after Him, that He is what He is, the Father who generates. In God, too, there are representations and images of His future acts, — that is to say, His counsel from all eternity, which is ever unchangeable. That which is divine is immutable; there is no change in Him, nor shadow of change. Blessed Denis (the Carthusian) who has made divine things in God's presence his study, says that these representations and images are marked out beforehand. In His counsels, God has noted and settled all that He would do, the unchanging future events before they came to pass. In the same way, a man who wished to build a house, would first make and think out a plan. Again, visible things are images of invisible and intangible things, on which they throw a faint light. Holy Scripture clothes in figure God and the angels, and the same holy man (Blessed Denis) explains why. When sensible things sufficiently render what is beyond sense, and give a form to what is intangible, a medium would be reckoned imperfect according to our standard, if it did not fully represent material vision, or if it required effort of mind. If, therefore, Holy Scripture, providing for our need, ever putting before us what is intangible, clothes it in flesh, does it not make an image of what is thus invested with our nature, and brought to the level of our desires, yet invisible? A certain conception through the senses thus takes place in the brain, which was not there before, and is transmitted to the judicial

faculty, and added to the mental store. Gregory, who is so eloquent about God, says that the mind which is set upon getting beyond corporeal things, is incapable of doing it. For the invisible things of God since the creation of the world are made visible through images. We see images in creation which remind us faintly of God, as when, for instance, we speak of the holy and adorable Trinity, imaged by the sun, or light, or burning rays, or by a running fountain, or a full river, or by the mind, speech, or the spirit within us, or by a rose tree, or a sprouting flower, or a sweet fragrance.

Again, an image is expressive of something in the future, mystically shadowing forth what is to happen. For instance, the ark represents the image of Our Lady, Mother of God,⁵ so does the staff and the earthen jar. The serpent brings before us Him who vanquished on the Cross the bite of the original serpent; the sea, water, and the cloud the grace of baptism.

Again, things which have taken place are expressed by images for the remembrance either of a wonder, or an honour, or dishonour, or good or evil, to help those who look upon it in after times that we may avoid evils and imitate goodness. It is of two kinds, the written image in books, as when God had the law inscribed on tablets, and when He enjoined that the lives of holy men should be recorded and sensible memorials be preserved in remembrance; as, for instance, the earthen jar and the staff in the ark. So now we preserve in writing the images and the good deeds of the past. Either, therefore, take away images altogether and be out of harmony with God who made these regulations, or receive them with the language and in the manner which befits them. In speaking of the manner let us go into the question of worship.

Worship is the symbol of veneration and of honour. Let us understand that there are different degrees of worship. First of all the worship of *latreia*, which we show to God, who alone by nature is worthy of worship. Then, for the sake of God who is worshipful by nature, we honour His saints and servants, as Josue and Daniel worshipped an angel, and David His holy places, when he says, 'Let us go to the place where His feet have stood.' Again, in His tabernacles, as when all the people of Israel adored in the tent, and standing round the temple in Jerusalem, fixing their gaze upon it from all sides, and worshipping from that day to this, or in the rulers established by Him, as Jacob rendered homage to Esau, his elder brother, and to Pharaoh, the divinely established ruler. Joseph was worshipped by his brothers. I am aware that worship was based on honour, as in the case of Abraham and the sons of Emmor. Either, then, do away with worship, or receive it altogether according to its proper measure.

Answer me this question. Is there only one God? You answer, 'Yes, there is only one Law-giver.' Why, then, does He command contrary things? The cherubim are not outside of creation; why, then, does He allow cherubim carved by the hand of man to overshadow the mercy-seat? Is it not evident that as it is impossible to make an image of God, who is uncircumscribed and impassible, or of one like to God, creation should not be worshipped as God. He allows the image of the cherubim who are circumscribed,⁶ and prostrate in adoration before the divine throne, to be made, and thus prostrate to overshadow the mercy-seat. It was fitting that the image of the heavenly choirs should overshadow the divine mysteries. Would you say that the ark and staff and mercy-seat were not made? Are they not produced by the hand of man? Are they not due to what you call contemptible matter? What was the tabernacle itself? Was it not an image? Was it not a type and a figure? Hence the holy Apostle's words concerning the observances of the law, 'Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.' As it was answered to Moses, when he was to finish the tabernacle: 'See' (He says), 'that thou make all things according to the pattern which

was shown thee on the Mount.’ But the law was not an image. It shrouded the image. In the words of the same Apostle, the law contains the shadow of the goods to come, not the image of those things. For if the law should forbid images, and yet be itself a forerunner of images, what should we say? If the tabernacle was a figure, and the type of a type, why does the law not prohibit image-making? But this is not in the least the case. There is a time for everything.

Of old, God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was never depicted. Now, however, when God is seen clothed in flesh, and conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. I will not cease from honouring that matter which works my salvation. I venerate it, though not as God. How could God be born out of lifeless things? And if God’s body is God by union (καθ’ ὑπόστασιν), it is immutable. The nature of God remains the same as before, the flesh created in time is quickened by a logical and reasoning soul. I honour all matter besides, and venerate it. Through it, filled, as it were, with a divine power and grace, my salvation has come to me. Was not the thrice happy and thrice blessed wood of the Cross matter? Was not the sacred and holy mountain of Calvary matter? What of the life-giving rock, the Holy Sepulchre, the source of our resurrection: was it not matter? Is not the most holy book of the Gospels matter? Is not the blessed table matter which gives us the Bread of Life? Are not the gold and silver matter, out of which crosses and altar-plate and chalices are made? And before all these things, is not the body and blood of our Lord matter? Either do away with the veneration and worship due to all these things, or submit to the tradition of the Church in the worship of images, honouring God and His friends, and following in this the grace of the Holy Spirit. Do not despise matter, for it is not despicable. Nothing is that which God has made. This is the Manichean heresy. That alone is despicable which does not come from God, but is our own invention, the spontaneous choice of will to disregard the natural law, — that is to say, sin. If, therefore, you dishonour and give up images, because they are produced by matter, consider what the Scripture says: And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Behold I have called by name Beseleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Juda. And I have filled him with the spirit of God, with wisdom and understanding, and knowledge in all manner of work. To devise whatsoever may be artificially made of gold, and silver, and brass, of marble and precious stones, and variety of wood. And I have given him for his companion, Ooliab, the son of Achisamech, of the tribe of Dan. And I have put wisdom in the heart of every skilful man, that they may make all things which I have commanded thee.’ And again: ‘Moses said to all the assembly of the children of Israel: This is the word the Lord hath commanded, saying: Set aside with you first fruits to the Lord. Let every one that is willing and hath a ready heart, offer them to the Lord, gold, and silver, and brass, violet, and purple, and scarlet twice dyed, and fine linen, goat’s hair, and ram’s skins died red and violet, coloured skins, selim-wood, and oil to maintain lights and to make ointment, and most sweet incense, onyx stones, and precious stones for the adorning of the ephod and the rational. Whosoever of you is wise, let him come, and make that which the Lord hath commanded.’ See you here the glorification of matter which you make inglorious. What is more insignificant than goat’s hair or colours? Are not scarlet and purple and hyacinth colours? Now, consider the handiwork of man becoming the likeness of the cherubim. How, then, can you make the law a pretence for giving up what it orders? If you invoke it against images, you should keep the Sabbath, and practise circumcision. It is certain that ‘if you observe the law, Christ will not profit you. You who are

justified in the law, you are fallen from grace.’ Israel of old did not see God, but we see the Lord’s glory face to face.

We proclaim Him also by our senses on all sides, and we sanctify the noblest sense, which is that of sight. The image is a memorial, just what words are to a listening ear. What a book is to the literate, that an image is to the illiterate. The image speaks to the sight as words to the ear; it brings us understanding. Hence God ordered the ark to be made of imperishable wood, and to be gilded outside and in, and the tablets to be put in it, and the staff and the golden urn containing the manna, for a remembrance of the past and a type of the future. Who can say these were not images and far-sounding heralds? And they did not hang on the walls of the tabernacle; but in sight of all the people who looked towards them, they were brought forward for the worship and adoration of God, who made use of them. It is evident that they were not worshipped for themselves, but that the people were led through them to remember past signs, and to worship the God of wonders. They were images to serve as recollections, not divine, but leading to divine things by divine power.

And God ordered twelve stones to be taken out of the Jordan, and specified why. For he says: ‘When your son asks you the meaning of these stones, tell him how the water left the Jordan by the divine command, and how the ark was saved and the whole people.’ How, then, shall we not record on image the saving pains and wonders of Christ our Lord, so that when my child asks me, ‘What is this?’ I may say, that God the Word became man, and that for His sake not Israel alone passed through the Jordan, but all the human race gained their original happiness. Through Him human nature rose from the lowest depths of the earth higher than the skies, and in His Person sat down on the throne His Father had prepared for Him.

But the adversary says: ‘Make an image of Christ or of His mother who bore Him (τῆς θεοτόκου), and let that be sufficient.’ O what folly this is! On your own showing, you are absolutely against the saints. For if you make an image of Christ and not of the saints, it is evident that you do not disown images, but the honour of the saints. You make statues indeed of Christ as of one glorified, whilst you reject the saints as unworthy of honour, and call truth a falsehood. ‘I live,’ says the Lord, ‘and I will glorify those who glorify Me.’ And the divine Apostle: therefore now he is not a servant, but a son. ‘And if a son, an heir also through God.’ Again, ‘If we suffer with Him, that we also may be glorified:’ you are not waging war against images, but against the saints. St John, who rested on His breast, says, that we shall be like to Him: just as a man by contact with fire becomes fire, not by nature, but by contact and by burning and by participation, so is it, I apprehend, with the flesh of the Crucified Son of God. That flesh, by participation through union (καθ’ ὑπόστασιν) with the divine nature, was unchangeably God, not in virtue of grace from God as was the case with each of the prophets, but by the presence of the Fountain Head Himself. God, the Scripture says, stood in the synagogue of the gods, so that the saints, too, are gods. Holy Gregory takes the words, ‘God stands in the midst of the gods,’ to mean that He discriminates their several merits. The saints in their lifetime were filled with the Holy Spirit, and when they are no more, His grace abides with their spirits and with their bodies in their tombs, and also with their likenesses and holy images, not by nature, but by grace and divine power.

God charged David to build Him a temple through his son, and to prepare a place of rest. Solomon, in building the temple, made the cherubim, as the book of Kings says. And he encompassed the cherubim with gold, and all the walls in a circle, and he had the cherubim carved, and palms inside and out, in a circle, not from the sides, be it observed. And there were bulls and lions and pomegranates. Is it not more

seemly to decorate all the walls of the Lord's house with holy forms and images rather than with beasts and plants? Where is the law declaring 'thou shalt not make any graven image'? But Solomon receiving the gift of wisdom, imaging heaven, made the cherubim, and the likenesses of bulls and lions, which the law forbade. Now if we make a statue of Christ, and likenesses of the saints, does not their being filled with the Holy Ghost increase the piety of our homage? As then the people and the temple were purified in blood and in burnt offerings, so now the Blood of Christ giving testimony under Pontius Pilate, and being Himself the first fruits of the martyrs, the Church is built up on the blood of the saints. Then the signs and forms of lifeless animals figured forth the human tabernacle, the martyrs themselves whom they were preparing for God's abode.

We depict Christ as our King and Lord, and do not deprive Him of His army. The saints constitute the Lord's army. Let the earthly king dismiss his army before he gives up his King and Lord. Let him put off the purple before he takes honour away from his most valiant men who have conquered their passions. For if the saints are heirs of God, and co-heirs of Christ, they will be also partakers of the divine glory of sovereignty. If the friends of God have had a part in the sufferings of Christ, how shall they not receive a share of His glory even on earth? 'I call you not servants,' our Lord says, 'you are my friends.' Should we then deprive them of the honour given to them by the Church? What audacity! What boldness of mind, to fight God and His commands! You, who refuse to worship images, would not worship the Son of God, the Living Image of the invisible God, and His unchanging form. I worship the image of Christ as the Incarnate God; that of Our Lady (τῆς θεοτόκου), the Mother of us all, as the Mother of God's Son; that of the saints as the friends of God. They have withstood sin unto blood, and followed Christ in shedding their blood for Him, who shed His blood for them. I put on record the excellencies and the sufferings of those who have walked in His footsteps, that I may sanctify myself, and be fired with the zeal of imitation. St Basil says, 'Honouring the image leads to the prototype.' If you raise churches to the saints of God, raise also their trophies. The temple of old was not built in the name of any man. The death of the just was a cause of tears, not of feasting. A man who touched a corpse was considered unclean, even if the corpse was Moses himself. But now the memories of the saints are kept with rejoicings. The dead body of Jacob was wept over, whilst there is joy over the death of Stephen. Therefore, either give up the solemn commemorations of the saints, which are not according to the old law, or accept images which are also against it, as you say. But it is impossible not to keep with rejoicing the memories of the saints. The Holy Apostles and Fathers are at one in enjoining them. From the time that God the Word became flesh He is as we are in everything except sin, and of our nature, without confusion. He has deified our flesh for ever, and we are in very deed sanctified through His Godhead and the union of His flesh with it. And from the time that God, the Son of God, impassible by reason of His Godhead, chose to suffer voluntarily He wiped out our debt, also paying for us a most full and noble ransom. We are truly free through the sacred blood of the Son pleading for us with the Father. And we are indeed delivered from corruption since He descended into hell to the souls detained there through centuries and gave the captives their freedom, sight to the blind, and chaining the strong one.⁷ He rose in the plenitude of His power, keeping the flesh of immortality which He had taken for us. And since we have been born again of water and the Spirit, we are truly sons and heirs of God. Hence St Paul calls the faithful holy; hence we do not grieve but rejoice over the death of the saints. We are then no longer under grace, being justified through faith, and knowing the one true God. The just man is not bound by the law.

We are not held by the letter of the law, nor do we serve as children, but grown into the perfect estate of man we are fed on solid food, not on that which conduces to idolatry. The law is good as a light shining in a dark place until the day breaks. Your hearts have already been illuminated, the living water of God's knowledge has run over the tempestuous seas of heathendom, and we may all know God. The old creation has passed away, and all things are renovated. The holy Apostle Paul said to St Peter, the chief of the Apostles:⁸ 'If you, being a Jew, live as a heathen and not a Jew, how will you persuade heathens to do as Jews do?' And to the Galatians: 'I will bear witness to every circumcised man that it is salutary to fulfil the whole law.'

Of old they who did not know God, worshipped false gods. But now, knowing God, or rather being known by Him, how can we return to bare and naked rudiments? I have looked upon the human form of God, and my soul has been saved. I gaze upon the image of God, as Jacob did, though in a different way. Jacob sounded the note of the future, seeing with immaterial sight, whilst the image of Him who is visible to flesh is burnt into my soul. The shadow and winding sheet and relics of the apostles cured sickness, and put demons to flight. How, then, shall not the shadow and the statues of the saints be glorified? Either do away with the worship of all matter, or be not an innovator. Do not disturb the boundaries of centuries, put up by your fathers.

It is not in writing only that they have bequeathed to us the tradition of the Church, but also in certain unwritten examples. In the twenty-seventh book of his work, in thirty chapters addressed to Amphilochios concerning the Holy Spirit, St Basil says, 'In the cherished teaching and dogmas of the Church, we hold some things by written documents; others we have received in mystery from the apostolical tradition.' Both are of equal value for the soul's growth. No one will dispute this who has considered even a little the discipline of the Church. For if we neglect unwritten customs, as not having much weight, we bury in oblivion the most pertinent facts connected with the Gospel. These are the great Basil's words. How do we know the Holy place of Calvary, or the Holy Sepulchre? Does it not rest on a tradition handed down from father to son? It is written that our Lord was crucified on Calvary, and buried in a tomb, which Joseph hewed out of the rock; but it is unwritten tradition which identifies these spots, and does more things of the same kind. Whence come the three immersions at baptism, praying with face turned towards the east, and the tradition of the mysteries?⁹ Hence St Paul says, Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have learned either by word, or by our epistle. As, then, so much has been handed down in the Church, and is observed down to the present day, why disparage images?

If you bring forward certain practices, they do not inculcate our worship of images, but the worship of heathens who make them idols. Because heathens do it foolishly, this is no reason for objecting to our pious practice. If the same magicians and sorcerers use supplication, so does the Church with catechumens; the former invoke devils, but the Church calls upon God against devils. Heathens have raised up images to demons, whom they call gods. Now we have raised them to the one Incarnate God, to His servants and friends, who are proof against the diabolical hosts.

If, again, you object that the great Epiphanius thoroughly rejected images, I would say in the first place the work in question is fictitious and unauthentic. It bears the name of some one who did not write it, which used to be commonly done. Secondly, we know that blessed Athanasius objected to the bodies of saints being put into chests, and that he preferred their burial in the ground, wishing to set at nought the strange custom of the Egyptians, who did not bury their dead under ground, but set them upon beds and couches. Thus, supposing that he really wrote this work, the great

Epiphanius, wishing to correct something of the same kind, ordered that images should not be used. The proof that he did not object to images, is to be found in his own church, which is adorned with images to this day. Thirdly, the exception is not a law to the Church, neither does one swallow make summer, as it seems to Gregory the theologian, and to the truth. Neither can one expression overturn the tradition of the whole Church which is spread throughout the world.

Accept, therefore, the teaching of Scripture and spiritual writers. If the Scripture *does* call the idols of heathens silver and gold, and the works of man's hand, it does not forbid the adoration of inanimate things, or man's handiwork, but the adoration of demons.

We have seen that prophets worshipped angels, and men, and kings, and the impious, and even a staff. David says, 'And you adore His footstool.' Isaias, speaking in God's name, says, 'The heavens are my throne, and the earth my footstool.' Now, it is evident to every one that the heavens and the earth are created things. Moses, too, and Aaron with all the people adored the work of hands. St Paul, the golden grasshopper¹⁰ of the Church, says in his Epistle to the Hebrews, 'But Christ being come, a high priest of the good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hand,' that is 'not of this creation.' And, again, 'For Jesus is not entered into the Holies made by hands, the patterns of the true; but into heaven itself.' Thus the former holy things, the tabernacle, and everything within it, were made by hands, and no one denies that they were adored.

Authentic Testimony of Ancient Fathers in favour of Images.

St Denis the Areopagite. From his Letter to Bishop Titus.

Instead of attaching the common conception to images, we should look upon what they symbolise, and not despise the divine mark and character which they portray, as sensible images of mysterious and heavenly visions.

Commentary. — Mark that he cautions us not to despise sacred images.

The Same, 'On the Names of God.'

We have taken the same line. On the one side, through the veiled language of Scripture and the help of oral tradition, intellectual things are understood through sensible ones, and the things above nature by the things that are. Forms are given to what is intangible and without shape, and immaterial perfection is clothed and multiplied in a variety of different symbols.

Commentary. — If it be a good work to clothe with shape and form, according to our standard, that which is formless, shapeless, and without consistency, how shall we not make images to ourselves in the same way of things perceived through form and shape, so that we may bear them in mind, and be moved to imitate what they represent.

The Same, on the 'Ecclesiastical Hierarchy.'

Now, if the substances (οὐσίαι) and orders above us, of which we have already made reverent mention, are without bodies, their hierarchy is intellectual and above sense.

We supply by the variety of sensible symbols the visible order, which is according to our own measure. Those sensible symbols lead us naturally to intellectual

conception, to God and His divine attributes. Spiritual minds form their own spiritual conceptions, but we are led to the divine vision by sensible images.

Commentary. — If, then, it be rational that we are led to the divine vision by sensible images, and if Divine Providence mercifully clothes in form and image that which is without either for our benefit, what is there unseemly about imaging, according to our capacity, Him who graciously disguised Himself for us in shape and form?

A tradition has come down to us that Angaros, King of Edessa, was drawn vehemently to divine love by hearing of our Lord,¹¹ and that he sent envoys to ask for His likeness. If this were refused, they were ordered to have a likeness painted. Then He, who is all-knowing and all-powerful, is said to have taken a strip of cloth, and pressing it to His face, to have left His likeness upon the cloth, which it retains to this day.

St Basil's Sermon on the Martyr St Barlam, beginning, 'In the first place the death of the saints.'

Arise, you renowned painters of brave deeds, who set forth by your art a faint image of the General. My praise of the laurel-crowned victor is faint compared to the colours of your brush. I will give up writing on the excellencies of the martyr whom you have crowned. I rejoice at the victory won to-day by your strength. I contemplate the hand put out to the flames, more powerfully dealt with by you. I see the struggle more clearly depicted on your statue. Let demons be enraged even now, overcome by the martyr's excellencies which you reveal. Let the powerful hand be again outstretched to victory. May Christ our Lord, the supreme Judge of the warfare, appear in picture. To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

From the same, from the Thirty Chapters to Amphilochios, on the Holy Ghost. —
Chap. xviii.

The image of the king is also called the king, and there are not two kings in consequence. Neither is power divided, nor is glory distributed. Just as the reigning power over us is one, so is our homage one, not many, and the honour given to the image reaches back to the original. What the image is in the one case as a representation, that the Son is by His humanity, and as in art likeness is according to form, so in the divine and incommensurable nature (ἀσυνθέτος) union is effected in the indwelling Godhead.

Commentary. — If the image of the king is the king, the image of Christ is Christ, and the image of a saint the saint, and if power is not divided nor glory distributed, honouring the image becomes honouring the one who is set forth in image. Devils have feared the saints, and have fled from their shadow. The shadow is an image, and I make an image that I may scare demons. If you say that only intellectual worship befits God, take away all corporeal things, light, and fragrance, prayer itself through the physical voice, the very divine mysteries which are offered through matter, bread, and wine, the oil of chrism, the sign of the Cross, for all this is matter. Take away the Cross, and the sponge of the Crucifixion, and the spear which pierced the life-giving side. Either give up honouring these things as impossible, or do not reject the veneration of images. Matter is endued with a divine power through prayer made to those who are depicted in image. Purple by itself is simple, and so is silk, and the cloak which is made of both. But if the king put it on, the cloak receives honour from the honour due to the wearer. So is it with matter. By itself it is of no account, but if

the one presented in image be full of grace, men become partakers of his grace according to their faith. The apostles knew our Lord with their bodily eyes; others knew the apostles, others the martyrs. I, too, desire to see them in the spirit and in the flesh, and to possess a saving remedy as I am a composite being. I see with my eyes, and revere that which represents what I honour, though I do not worship it as God. Now you, perhaps, are superior to me, and are lifted up above bodily things, and being, as it were, not of flesh, you make light of what is visible, but as I am human and clothed with a body, I desire to see and to be corporeally with the saints. Condescend to my humble wish that you may be secure on your heights. God accepts my longing for Him and for His saints. For He rejoices at the praises of His servant, according to the great St Basil in his panegyric of the Forty Martyrs. Listen to the words which he uttered in honour of the martyr St Gordion.

From St Basils Sermon on St Gordion.

The mere memory of just deeds is a source of spiritual joy to the whole world; people are moved to imitate the holiness of which they hear. The life of holy men is as a light illuminating the way for those who would see it. And again, when we recount the story of holy lives we glorify in the first place the Lord of those servants, and we give praise to the servants on account of their testimony, which is known to us. We rejoice the world through good report.

Commentary. — The remembrance of the saints is thus, you see, a glory to God, praise of the saints, joy and salvation to the whole world. Why, then, would you destroy it? This remembrance is kept by preaching and by images, says the same great St Basil.

The same, on the Martyr St Gordion.

Just as burning follows naturally on fire, and fragrance on sweet ointment, so must good arise from holy actions. For it is no small thing to represent past events according to life. Is it a dim memory of the man's wrestlings which has come down to us, and does not the painter's picture tally with our present conflict? Now, as painters draw images from images, they frequently depart from the original as much as the image itself does, and as we did not see what they represent, there is no little fear that we may injure the truth.

The same, at the end.

The sun fills us with perpetual wonder, though always before us, so the memory of this man is ever fresh.

Commentary. — It is evident that it is fresh through sermon and image.

Testimony of the same, from his Sermon on the Forty Martyrs.

Can the lover of the martyrs have too much of their memory? For the honour shown to the just, our fellow-men, is a testimony to the goodness of our common Lord.

And again: —

Recognise the blessedness of the martyr heartily, that you may be a martyr in will; thus, without persecutor, or fire, or blows, found worthy of the same reward.

Commentary. — How, then, would you dissuade me from honouring the saints, and be envious of my salvation? Listen to what he says a little further on to show that he united the painter's art to oratory.

St Basil.

See, then, that setting them before us in representation, we are making them helpful to the living, exhibiting their holiness to us all as if in a picture.

Commentary. — Do you understand that both image and sermon teach one lesson? He says: 'Let us show them forth in a sermon as if in a picture.' And again: Writers and painters point out the struggles of war; the first by the art of style, the second with their brush, and each induce many to be brave. That which a spoken account presents to the hearing, a silent picture portrays for imitation.

Commentary. — What better proof have we that images are the books of the illiterate, the ever-speaking heralds of honouring the saints, teaching those who gaze upon them without words, and sanctifying the spectacle. I have not many books nor time for study, and I go into a church, the common refuge of souls, my mind wearied with conflicting thoughts. I see before me a beautiful picture and the sight refreshes me, and induces me to glorify God. I marvel at the martyr's endurance, at his reward, and fired with burning zeal, I fall down to adore God through His martyr, and receive a grace of salvation. Have you not heard the same holy father in his homily on the beginning of the Psalms, say that the Holy Spirit, knowing the human race were obstinate and hard to lead, mixed honey with the psalm-singing? What do you say to this? Shall I not perpetuate the martyr's testimony both by word and paint brush? Shall I not embrace with my eyes that which is a wonder to the angels and to the whole world, formidable to the devil, a terror to demons, as the same great Father says? Again, towards the end of his homily on the forty martyrs, he exclaims, 'O sainted band! O sacred fraternity! O invincible army! protectors of the human race, solace of the troubled, hope of your petitioners, most powerful intercessors, light of the world, bloom both intellectual and material of the Churches! The earth has not hidden you from sight, heaven has received you. May its gates be opened to you. The spectacle is worthy of angels and patriarchs, prophets, and just.'

Commentary. — How shall I not desire to see what the angels desire? St Basil's brother, who is one with him in thought, St Gregory of Nyssa, shares his sentiments.

St Gregory of Nyssa, from the 'Structure of Man.'

Supplementary. — Just as in human fashion the image makers of the powerful grasp the character of the form and set forth the royal dignity with the insignia of the purple, and their handiwork is called image or king, so is it with human nature. As it was created to rule over other creations, it was made as an animated type or image, partaking of the original in dignity and name.

The same, Fifth Chapter.

The divine beauty is not set forth either in form or comeliness of design or colouring, but is contemplated in speechless blessedness, according to its virtue. So do painters transfer human forms to canvas through certain colours, laying on suitable and harmonious tints to the picture, so as to transfer the beauty of the original to the likeness.

Commentary. — You see that the divine beauty is not set forth in form or shape, and on this account it cannot be conveyed by an image (οὐκ εἰκονίζεται): it is the human form which is transferred to canvas by the artist's brush. If, therefore, the Son of God became man, taking the form of a servant, and appearing in man's nature, a perfect man, why should His image not be made? If, in common parlance, the king's image is called the king, and the honour shown to the image redounds to the original, as holy Basil says, why should the image not be honoured and worshipped, not as God, but as the image of God Incarnate?

The same, from his Sermon at Constantinople on the Godhead of the Son and of the Spirit, and on Abraham.

Then the father proceeds to bind his son. I have often seen paintings of this touching scene, and could not look at it with dry eyes, art setting it forth so vividly. Isaac is lying before the altar, his legs bound, his hands tied behind his back. The father approaching the victim, clasping his hair with the left hand, stoops over the face so piteously turned towards him, and holds in his right hand the sword, ready to strike. Already the point of the sword is on the body when the divine voice is heard, forbidding the consummation.

Leo,¹² Bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus. From his book against the Jews, on the Adoration of the Cross, and the Statues of the Saints, and on Relics.

If you, O Jew, reproach me saying that I adore the wood of the Cross as God, why do you not reproach Jacob, who worshipped on the point of his staff (ἐπὶ τὸ ἄκρον τῆς ράβδου)? Now it is evident that he was not worshipping wood. So with us; we are worshipping Christ through the Cross, not the wood of the Cross.

Commentary. — If we adore the Cross, made of whatever wood it may be, how shall we not adore the image of the Crucified?

From the same.

Abraham worshipped the impious men who sold him the cave, and bent his knee to the ground, yet did not worship them as gods. Jacob praised Pharaoh, an impious idolator, yet not as God, and he fell down at the feet of Esau, yet did not worship him as God. And again, How does God order us to worship the earth and mountains? 'Exalt the Lord your God and worship Him upon His holy mountain, and adore His footstool,' that is, the earth. For heaven is My throne, He says, and the earth My footstool. How was it that Moses worshipped Jothor, an idolator, and Daniel, Nabuchodonosor? How can you reproach me because I honour those who honour God and show Him service? Tell me, is it not fitting to worship the saints, rather than to throw stones at them as you do? Is it not right to worship them, rather than to attack them, and to fling your benefactors into the mire? If you loved God, you would be ready to honour His servants also. And if the bones of the just are unclean, why were the bones of Jacob and Joseph brought with all honour from Egypt? How was it that a dead man arose again on touching the bones of Eliseus? If God works wonders through bones, it is evident that He can work them through images, and stones, and many other things, as in the case of Eliseus, who gave his staff to his servant, saying, 'With this go and raise from the dead the son of the Sunamitess.' With his staff Moses chastised Pharaoh, parted the waters, struck the rock, and drew forth the stream. And Solomon said, 'Blessed is the wood by which justice cometh.' Eliseus took iron out of

the Jordan with a piece of wood. And again, the wood is the wood of life, and the wood of Sabec, that is, of remission. Moses humbled the serpent with wood and saved the people. The blossoming rod in the tabernacle confirmed the priesthood of Aaron. Perhaps, O Jew, you will tell me that God prescribed to Moses beforehand all the things of the testimony in the tabernacle. Now, I say to you that Solomon made a great variety of things in the temple in carvings and sculpture, which God had not ordered him to do. Nor did the tabernacle of the testimony contain them, nor the temple which God showed to Ezechiel, nor was Solomon to be blamed in this. He had had these sculptured images made for the glory of God as we do. You, too, had many and varied images and signs in the Old Testament to serve as a reminder of God, if you had not lost them through ingratitude. For instance, the rod of Moses, the tablets of the law, the burning bush, the rock giving forth water, the ark containing the manna, the altar set on fire from above (πυρενθεον), the lamina bearing the divine name, the ephod, the tabernacle overshadowed by God. If you had prepared all these things by day and by night, saying, 'Glory be to Thee, O Almighty God, who hast done wonders in Israel through all these things'; if through all these ordinances of the law, carried out of old, you had fallen on your knees to adore God, you would see that worship is given to Him by images.

And further on: —

He who truly loves a friend or the king, and especially his benefactor, if he sees that benefactor's son, or his staff, or his chair, or his crown, or his house, or his servant, he holds them fast in his embrace, and if he honours his benefactor, the king, how much more God. Again I repeat it, would that you had made images according to the law of Moses and the prophets, and that day by day you had worshipped the God of images. Whenever, then, you see Christians adoring the Cross, know that they are adoring the Crucified Christ, not the mere wood.¹³ If, indeed, they honoured wood as wood, they would be bound to worship trees of whatever kind, as you, O Israel, worshipped them of old, saying to the tree and to the stone, 'Thou art my God and didst bring me forth.' We do not speak either to the Cross or to the representations of the saints in this way. They are not our gods, but books which lie open and are venerated in churches in order to remind us of God and to lead us to worship Him. He who honours the martyr honours God, to whom the martyr bore testimony. He who worships the apostle of Christ worships Him who sent the apostle. He who falls at the feet of Christ's mother most certainly shows honour to her Son. There is no God but one, He who is known and adored in the Trinity.

Commentary. — Who is the faithful interpreter of blessed Epiphanius — Leontius, whose teaching adorned the island of Cyprus, or those who spoke according to their own conceits? Listen to the testimony of Severianus, Bishop of the Gabali.

Severianus, Bishop of the Gabali, on the Dedication of the Cross.

How was it that the image of the enemy gave life to our progenitors? ...

How was it that the image of the serpent worked salvation to the people in distress? Would it not have been more reasonable to say, 'If any of you be bitten, let him look up to heaven, to God, and he shall be saved, or let him look towards the tabernacle of God'? Passing over this, he set up the image of the Cross alone. Why did Moses do this, who said to the people, 'Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth'? However, why do I speak to unworthy people? Tell me, devout servant of God, will you do what is forbidden, and disregard

what you are told to do? He who said, ‘Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing,’ condemned the golden calf, and you make a brazen serpent, and this not secretly, but most openly, so that it is known to all. Moses answers, I laid down that commandment in order to root out impiety, and to withdraw the people from all apostasy and idolatry; now, I have the serpent cast for a good purpose — as a figure of the truth. And just as I have put up a tabernacle, and everything in it, and cherubim, the likeness of the invisible powers, over the holy of holies, as a sign and figure of the future, so I have set up a serpent for the salvation of the people, to serve as a preliminary to the image of the Cross, and the redemption contained in it. As a confirmation of this, listen to the Lord saying, ‘As Moses exalted the serpent in the desert, so must you exalt the Son of Man, that every one believing in Him may not be lost, but may have eternal life.’

Commentary. — Notice that His commandment not to make any graven thing was given to draw the people from idolatry, to which they were prone, and that the brazen serpent was an image of our Lord’s suffering.

Listen to what I am going to say as a proof that images are no new invention. It is an ancient practice well known to the best and foremost of the fathers. Elladios, the disciple of blessed Basil and his successor, says in his Life of Basil that the holy man was standing by the image of Our Lady, on which was painted also the likeness of Mercurius, the renowned martyr. He was standing by it asking for the removal of the impious apostate Julian, and he received this revelation from the statue. He saw the martyr vanish for a time, and then reappear, holding a bloody spear.

Taken word for word from the Life of St John Chrysostom.

Blessed John loved the epistles of St Paul exceedingly. ... He had an image of the apostle in a place where he was wont to retire now and then on account of his physical weakness, for he outdid nature in watchings and vigils. As he read through St Paul’s epistles, he had the image before him, and spoke to the apostle as if he had been present, praising him, and directing all his thoughts to him. ...

When Proclus had finished speaking, gazing intently at the image of the apostle, and recognising the likeness to the man he had seen, saluting John, he said, pointing to the image: ‘Forgive me, father; the man I saw talking to you is very like this statue. In fact, I should say he is the same.’

In the life of St Eupraxia we are told that her Superior showed her the likeness of our Lord.

We read in the life of St Mary of Egypt that she prayed before the statue of Our Lady and besought her intercession, and so obtained leave to enter the Church.¹⁴

In all the past array of Christian priests and kings, wise and pious, conspicuous by teaching and example, in so many councils of holy and inspired fathers, how is it that no one has pointed out these things? We are not advocating a new faith. The law shall come out of Sion, the Holy Ghost said prophetically, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. We do not advocate one thing at one time, and another at another, nor that the faith should become a laughing-stock to those outside. We will not allow the king’s commands to overturn the tradition handed down from the fathers. It is not for pious kings to overturn ecclesiastical boundaries. These are not patristic ways. Things done by force are impositions, and do not carry persuasion. A proof of this was given in the 2nd Council of Ephesus, when a decree, which has never been recognised as valid, was enforced by the emperor’s hand, and blessed Flavian was put to death. Councils do not belong to kings, as the Lord says: ‘Wherever one or two are gathered

together in My name, there I am in the midst of them.’ Christ did not give to kings the power to bind and to loose, but to the apostles, and to their successors and pastors and teachers. ‘If an angel were to teach you a different gospel to what you have received,’ St Paul says — but we will be silent about what follows, in the hope of their conversion. And if we find the warning disregarded, which may God avert, we will then add the rest. Let us hope it will not be needed.

If any one should enter a house and should see on the walls a history in painting of Moses and Aaron, perchance he might ask about the people who are walking across the sea as if it were dry land. ‘Who are they?’ he asks. What would you say? ‘Are they not the sons of Israel?’ ‘Who is dividing the sea with his rod?’ Would you not say ‘Moses’? So if a man makes an image of Christ crucified, and you are asked who he is, you reply, ‘It is Christ our Lord, who became incarnate for us.’ Yes, O Lord, we adore all that belongs to Thee, and we take to our hearts Thy Godhead, Thy power and goodness, Thy mercy towards us, Thy condescension and Thy Incarnation. And as men fear touching red-hot iron, not because of the iron but because of the heat, so do we worship Thy flesh, not for the nature of flesh, but through the Godhead united to that flesh according to substance. We worship Thy sufferings. Who has ever known death worshipped, or suffering venerated? Yet we truly worship the physical death of our God and His saving sufferings. We adore Thy image and all that is Thine; Thy servants, Thy friends, and most of all Thy Mother, the Mother of God.

We beseech, therefore, the people of God, the faithful flock, to hold fast to the ecclesiastical traditions. The gradual taking away of what has been handed down to us would be undermining the foundation stones, and would in no short time overthrow the whole structure. May we prove steadfast, unflinching, immovable, founded on the solid Rock which is Christ, to whom be praise, glory, and worship, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, now and for ever. Amen.

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