

**Icon of Mary¹⁾:
the Horizon of Theotokos**

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Icon of Mary: the Horizon of Theotokos

The icons as religious art are closely associated with the formation of Christian theology. The polemics surrounding the veneration of icons lasted over a hundred years resulting in many deaths and much material damage.

The Kievan-Russians were converted to Christianity after the wane of the storm of iconoclasm. They cherished the icon of Mary and developed their own artistic expression in various types. Mary was not only the sublimated figure of their native goddess who was worshipped before their Christianization, but also a revelation of an alternative face of God which had been hidden behind the patriarchal male God of Christianity.

Mary in Byzantine iconographical representation broke the boundaries of the Eastern Church. She is particularly active among those who suffer from oppressions and injustice, and interestingly, she is represented in the style of the Eastern Icon, rather than that of the Western Madonna.

In June 1993, I had the rare opportunity of visiting the Ukraine and Russia. It was an early summer with thick foliage. From the window of the train travelling slowly in the white night from Moscow to Kiev I could enjoy the wide and somewhat monotonous scenery of forests and fields. It is so different from the small-scaled Japanese country scene which contains much variety. In towns Russian girls smile with beautiful, big eyes. Russian artifacts are in such bright colours. People love red which symbolizes happiness, according to the explanation of the guide. I was at a loss to find a discrepancy between what I had experienced in my journey so far and Russian icons. By facing this reality, I came to understand the subdued, simplified and spiritualized character of icons.

The magnificent liturgical music of the Orthodox Church brings about another phase of Russian artistic expression. A cappella is sung in beautiful harmony. It is very effective to alternate the chorus with the antiphon sung in solo. The harmony of sound reflects unity in diversity. I found the liturgical music specially meaningful in terms of women's participation, as singing is the only active role given to them within the entire church services. It was a precious fortnight to have a glimpse of the depth of Russian culture.

Having lived in forests, the ancient Russians gradually increased the cultivated land. Forest and field, springs and rivers with creatures living within them were the source of their livelihood. Nature was also the birthplace of their folklore. Gods and spirits were found everywhere in the houses and the farms. All living creatures, humans, animals and plants alike, were embraced in the bosom of the Great Mother. She was the source of life, the queen who governed the earth.

The Russians built the house of God for the first time after becoming Christians. Frescoes and mosaics adorned the chapel walls, but the people venerated icons painted on pieces of wood in portable sizes. They loved especially the icon of Mary. People could either carry these icons or keep them at home. Icons remained right in the midst of the lives of the

people helping them to keep their faith.

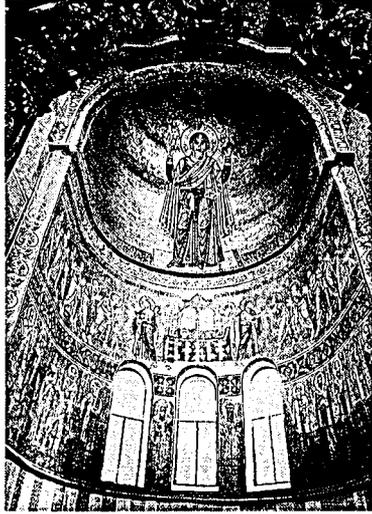
Christianization of Kiev-Russians

The foundation of nationhood of the East Slavs was not so early compared to the other groups that moved into western Europe. Many of the Slavs lived at the periphery as well as within the heart of the Byzantine empire and thus came in touch with Christianity. A good number of them seemed to have been in the city of Thessaloniki which was the center of the Macedonia province. In the 9th century, two brother monks, Cyril and Methodius, natives of this city were commissioned to the Slavic land. They invented the Slavic alphabet and translated the Bible. Thus the Slavs were one of the earliest peoples to have the Scriptures in their mother tongue. It is important to note that the Slavs accepted literacy and Christianity simultaneously.

In 988 A.D. Christianity was officially introduced through the baptism of Prince Vladimir of Kiev-Russia. According to the tradition, he was so fascinated by the beauty of *Hagia Sophia* in Constantinople and its splendid liturgy, that he decided to be baptized. This episode reveals the artistic sensitivity of the Slavs. His conversion, in actuality, carried political intentions for both Byzantine and Kievan rulers. Kievan Russia having been at the northern edge of the Byzantine empire was a threat for her and in need of control. Christianization had a political overtone. Vladimir divorced his former wives immediately after his conversion and received Princess Ann who was a sister of the Byzantine emperor Basilus I. The clergymen of Constantinople followed her and established a Metropolitan seat which was subordinated to the Byzantine Patriarch. Prince Iaroslav, the son of Vladimir, also married a Byzantine princess. It was he who built the oldest cathedral of Kiev, *Hagia Sophia*, named after the cathedral in Constantinople. Completed after 20 years in 1037, the church stood on the very spot where Kievan Russia won the victory over the Pechenegs, the Turkish nomads.

Hagia Sophia still stands surrounded by beautiful woods. It stopped

functioning as a church in 1934 and is still under government control and is treasured as a national cultural asset. As you enter the door, a large mosaic of Mary in *orante* (a woman in prayer) style welcomes you (picture 1). She is high up under the dome, looking straight at you. She holds her arms up showing the palms of her hands. The shawl that covers her head and shoulders is so long that it is folded up over her arms. Her right foot steps slightly forward, giving the expression of strength rather than gentleness. The *Orante* style has a long history in



Pic. 1 The dome of Hagia Sophia, Kiev

the oldest world civilizations from Egypt to Mesopotamia. The figure was carved, molded or painted depicting the Great Mother and or a consecrated maiden in a temple who was supposed to represent the former.²⁾

The Trajectory of the Icon

The word icon is derived from the Greek *eikon* which means image. Icons were an important means to transmit doctrine to illiterates. Among the Slavs, the icons of Mary were as numerous as those of Christ. The icon artists cleansed themselves by fasting and followed exactly the mode and the rules of the painting: drawing icons was a sacred act. The artists were considered as tools in depicting the sacred images: they did not paint, the image appeared itself. The Japanese can find an analogy to this state of soul. They paint with the attitude of no-self (*muga*), that is with concentration and without any worldly craving.

Christianity, which was one of the multiple religions in the Roman empire, met a severe persecution locally from the first to the third century. The underground cemeteries called catacombs were not only in Rome



Pic.2 "A Lady in Purple Dress".
An Egyptian Portrait of Mid-
Second Century (author)

but also in Naples, Sicily and Malta. Among the fresco paintings found in the catacombs, symbols such as fish, grapes and baskets of bread were often used for Christ, while Mary was usually depicted in person.³⁾ Already in the second century, Annunciation and Nativity scenes together with the style of orante appear on the walls. One of the characteristics of catacomb wall painting is the subdued expression: the expression of the spiritual world supercedes aestheticism. Consequently the pictures are two dimensional. These fresco paintings followed Greco-Roman style and skill in artistic expression, nevertheless they

were the predecessor of icons on the conceptual level.

Another root of the craftsmanship of icons is found in Egyptian mummy portrait painting. For two hundred years Egypt enjoyed a classical capitalistic economy under *Pax Romano*. Tenant farming, manual industry, and trading prospered. The grain produced in the granaries supported one third of the Roman population, Egyptian flax supplied the clothing of the Romans, and papyrus helped their cultural development. From the first century B.C. to the fourth century A.D., Alexandrian Egyptians of Greek extraction manufactured mummy portraits (picture 2) in abundance. They are mostly tempera, and after the style of the late Hellenistic realism. Their heavily shaded eyes are looking intensely at the other world.⁴⁾ The portraits in early Christian mosaics or icons are also looking straight ahead with big eyes heavily accented.

Christianity was born in the midst of Greco-Roman pagan culture. The early Christian leaders valued the iconographic expression of dogma, as it was viewed as analogous to the concept of incarnation. Logos is the

Word, the revelation of God (John 1:1-18). He made Himself low (*kenosis*) and took the form (*morphei*) of man and appeared as man (Letter to the Philippians 2:7). Human beings can meet the unseen God through His Son Jesus who became man. Thus Christ is the icon of God. In Christ, spirit and matter are unified. The Icon reveals the close connection between the creator and the creatures. The essence of the icon was such that the artist was advised to follow closely the directions of the painting and restrain the drive for artistry. It was considered high art to arouse the religious feeling of the onlookers, but was regarded as important to curb a realistic or sensual expression. The fact that no signature was allowed for the works was the natural outcome of self-restraint. The Church Fathers of the second to the third century⁵⁾ were so careful that they did not encourage icon manufacturing, for icons carried a dialectical element: it contained a seed for future iconoclasm.

Christianity entered into a new era after the official recognition of Constantine the great in 313A.D.. In 380A.D. the emperor Theodosius made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. The task for the newly recognized Christianity was to define and explain doctrine clearly and logically using the tools of Greek philosophy. From the fourth to the ninth century the Church convoked eight ecumenical councils and discussed divine and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. Those who did not admit the conclusions of the councils were dismissed as heretics. The sole concern of the theologians was how to clarify faith in Christ, consequently they referred only incidentally to Mary. But while struggling with Christology, they could not avoid defining Mary who gave birth to the human Christ. It was but natural that the emphasis moved gradually from Christ to Mary. Finally in 431A.D. the Council of Ephesus proclaimed Mary as *Theotokos* (the one who gave birth to God). The Church thought that it found its identity through theological speculation, and that it had finally won the victory over paganism and could show that fact by destroying the temples, and replacing them by Christian churches. The Church leaders were unaware of the big gap of consciousness lying between them and the common folk, that is to say, the former did not real-

ize the tenacity of folk belief among the latter.⁶⁾ Although they were baptized as Christians and attended the Christian liturgy, the old faith fostered in generation after generation was still alive in the hearts and souls of the people in the Mediterranean world. After the fourth century with the discovery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem by Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great⁷⁾, the veneration of icons and relics together with the pilgrimage to the Holy Land spread rapidly in the empire. People saw in these objects union of matter and spirit, and that of nature and its creator. When *Theotokos* was solemnly proclaimed in the church of Ephesus which was built over the old historic temple of Artemis, the cry of the people praising Mary as Mother of God and Heavenly Queen echoed the shout of four hundred years before hailing Artemis (Acts 19:21-40).

The iconoclasm that lasted from 726 to 843A.D. can be divided into two periods. The first period actually started with the imperial decree of Leo III in 730A.D. Following caesaropapist policy, he demanded the signature of the patriarch of Constantinople on his decree. Defenders of icons were excommunicated, deported or imprisoned. Illustrated books and icons were burned, mosaic stones were peeled off, people were forbidden to enter the chapels, monasteries were destroyed, monks were forced to marry and many of them had their hands amputated. This radical destruction caused the disappearance of all the pre-eighth century icons except those hidden in the remote monasteries in the Sinai and Egyptian deserts.

Monks in great number fled to Italy, Cyprus, Syria and Palestine. Counting only those who took refuge in Italy during the reign of Leo III and his radical son, Constantinus V, over fifty-thousand could be numbered.⁸⁾ Most of them having been icon manufacturers, they continued the work in the land of exile, thus influencing Italian art. Iconographic polemics spread also in the Western Church. Rejecting the Byzantine emperor's decree, Pope Gregory II convoked a synod in 727A.D. confirming the stance of icon worshipers. His successor Gregory III opened a synod in Rome again to reconfirm the policy.

The iconoclasts' position was based on the theory of Emperor Con-

stantinus V asserting that the real icon is Christ's body in the Eucharist, hence any other icons are idols, because the real icon has the same substance and nature with the image it depicted. The defenders of icons refuted that the eucharist was never called icon in any Christian tradition. John of Damascus, the spokesman for the defenders of icons, explained its essence saying that they worship God through an icon which is the prototype, but they do not worship the icon itself.

In discussing iconoclasm, we cannot overlook the political reason that lay underneath the theological debate. The actual and practical if not real reason of the iconoclast emperor Leo III was the threat of Islam. The boundary line of the Byzantine empire had not stopped receding since the middle of the seventh century and the empire lost Egypt and Syria to Islam. They were its most important provinces in terms of their economic power but were difficult to rule because of their theological stance. They were monophysites who took an iconoclastic position siding with the Muslims. The emperor felt threatened because icon veneration which the Caliphate attacked as idol worship might trigger a further invasion. Iconoclasm could be a powerful means to save the country. This idea justified the confiscation of the monasteries which were the centers of icon production as well as being large estates which could serve as substitution for the vast imperial properties in the provinces now lost to the Caliphate. The confusion caused by iconoclasm was in fact due to the politico-economical weakening of the Byzantine empire.

We should note the contributions of two empresses to the revival of icons. In 787A.D., Irene became the regent of Constantinus VI who succeeded to the throne at an early age. Soon after the emperor's death, she convoked the Seventh Ecumenical Council, known as the Second Nicaean Council, which validated and restored icon veneration. People enjoyed temporary peace for twenty-seven years until Leo V prohibited icons in 815A.D.. The second period of iconoclasm started with the emperor's calculation that the policy of iconoclasm had greater gain than the devotion to icons. Thus, iconoclasm lasted another twenty-eight years with increasing severity and without any theological development. The stream of

monks who upheld the cult of icons were sentenced to death. Theodora, becoming the regent of her son, Michael III, after the death of her husband, Theophilus I (829-842A.D.), finally brought to an end the state of chaos of the empire. A synod was held in Constantinople in 843A.D. to reestablish icon veneration. The controversy over Christology which lasted for five hundred years was also concluded.⁹⁾

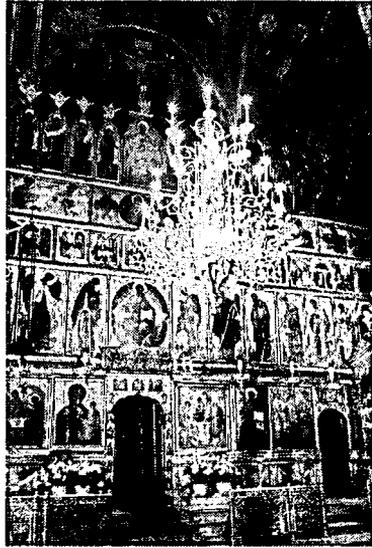
Iconoclasm that had lasted a hundred years led, in fact, to a reappraisal of icons. Besides the theological and politico-economical phases of the iconoclastic controversies, there was also a problem for Christian art. Actually the iconoclasts were not against art itself, but on the contrary, were its promoters. Although they rejected the representations of Christ, Mary and the saints, they freely decorated the walls of the churches with scenery, animals and other secular subjects. The art of the iconoclasts was characterized by the revival of hellenism combined with Islamic art. This was a threat for the Byzantine identity and a crisis for early Christian art. The undaunted attitude of the persecuted was a powerful and eloquent witness. They never gave up icons despite the fact of imperial decrees or sermons in churches. They never yielded though stigmatised as heretics, and they continued to resist by insubordination.

After the storm of iconoclasm, the Byzantine empire recovered political strength and recaptured from Islam the lost territories of Crete, Armenia, Syria and south Italy. Economic prosperity also revisited the empire. Icon manufacture spread from Byzantine to Kiev-Russia, Bulgaria, and Serbia during the Macedonian (867-1057A.D.) and Comnenus (1057-1185A.D.) dynasties. It was precisely at this time that Kievan Russia became Christian. At the Pechersk monastery, the oldest Lavra of the country, master productions were found already in the eleventh century.

Icon of Mary

On entering an Orthodox church, one is impressed by the believers who pray devoutly in front of numerous icons with bunches of burning candles. Icons are set not only on the iconostasis (picture 3)³⁾, but on walls

and columns. One realises that the chapel is indeed a meeting place of God and the people. Icons were also in roadside shrines. They accompanied the farmers in the fields and the travellers on their journey. Last spring, more than a hundred masterpieces of the Wanderers were brought from the Tretyakov Gallery to be exhibited in the Tokyo Municipal Museum. I cannot forget a piece entitled *On the Way: The Migrant's Death*. An icon was placed on the breast of the deceased father. His wife was prostrate beside him in anguish while his son cast a sorrowful glance over him.



Pic. 3 Iconostasis Moscow, Troitz Sergiev Lavra

The theotokos type outnumbered all other Russian icons and it was the most frequently used title for Mary. For the Russians Mary was Holy Mother rather than Blessed Virgin. She was the embodiment of divine Motherhood. Mary was not only the mother of Christ, but that of all human beings. She was also the mother of all creatures and of the universe. As such, she gave life to all creatures, and helped their growth with her love. The image of the Great Mother which was deeply rooted in Russian folk religion is still vividly depicted among the motifs of peasant artcraft. In Russia Christianity replaced the folk religion before it evolved fully into a systematized mythology. Their primary religious intuition of the divine motherhood had not attained its mythical and cultic completion, thus allowing the Christian guise of Holy Womanhood to take form, be fertilized and sublimated and finally establish the Russian identity.¹¹⁾ It looked as if the native folk religion had been conquered by Christianity. Folk religion and historical religion had been vertically set in the traditional value system. Following the paradigm of evolutionary development, the na-

tive religion is primitive, pagan and uncivilized. But it survives within the historical religion and within the soul of individuals waiting to be sublimated.

There are seven basic patterns of Marian icons and over two hundred variations. The artists, while preserving the basic form, are allowed to vary the details. The classical seven modes are, first, *Blacherniotissa* taken from the Theotokos chapel in Blacherne on the outskirts of Constantinople. Orante that stands with arms lifted up belongs to this family. *Platytera* which is also called "a great Panagia" (the most holy one) has a medallion on her breast on which a mature faced Child Jesus who is either raising both his arms like his mother, or is holding a scroll (the Bible) in his left hand and blessing with his right hand (picture 4), looks straight ahead. He is the *Emmanuel* type, Christ as a child is full of wisdom.

The second type is *Hodigitria* which means a woman who leads the way. Mary, while holding the child in her left arm, points at him with her right hand (picture 5). This type was already found in Syria in the sixth century. The prototype represented the child in swaddling clothes embracing the mother. This intimacy was altered in Byzantine art; the child clothed in golden dress holds the scroll. Mother and child do not show reciprocity. The child looks straight ahead, and the Mother's eyes also look straight ahead or somewhere beyond her child.

The third type is *Eleousa* which means compassion (picture 6). Mary is said to have a sad look because of her knowledge of the forthcoming Passion of her Son. The infant Christ is hugging his mother revealing his affection, but his Mother does not seem to respond. Theotokos of Vladimir is typical of this type, and it will be treated in detail later in this article.

The fourth type, *Glykophilusa* (picture 7), a caressing mother, is seen more in early Italian and Greek icons. It resembles *Eleousa* with the exception that Mary shows great tenderness without a look of grief and the child is holding the hand of his mother. Many of the Western paintings follow this type.

The fifth is *Galaktotrophusa* (picture 8), a suckling mother. Egyptian



Pic. 4 Platytera/a great Panagia



Pic. 5 Hodigitria



Pic. 6 Eleousa, Holy Mother of Vladimir



Pic. 7 Glykophilusa



Pic. 8 Galaktotrophusa



Pic. 9 Nikopoia

paintings of the goddess Isis giving milk to her son, Horus, were well known in the Roman world, and the cult of Isis was very prevalent. The representations of Mary with her child were based on these contemporary art forms. This subject is much favoured by the later Western painters but treated infrequently in icons.

The sixth one is *Kyriotissa*, the mother of the Saviour. She stands and hugs the child. The last one is *Nikopoia* (picture 9), the one who brings victory. This type is known as Our Lady who sits on the throne. Mary holds the child on her lap seated on a cushion and two angels at both sides are adoring them.¹²⁾

I would put these classical types into two categories: Mary without a child in her arms and Mary with her child. The first group represents Mary in her conception, representing the mystery of Incarnation. The Word was made flesh and dwelled among us (John 1:14). Mary with her arms stretching out, received all from God without reservation. The principle of complete acceptance and transformation was materialized in Mary.

Incarnation was made possible by her "yes", and Christians receive new life through her. There are two division within this group: *Orante* and *Platytera*. In the *Platytera* form Mary's womb was represented by the medallion on her breast. *Orante* without the child is the pregnant Mary. The great icon of the dome of *Hagia sophia* in orante style is replete with symbolism. The dome is the place that protects the living creatures. It is analogical to the womb which has a similar function. The dome of *Hagia sophia* in Kiev is very high but small, compared to the spacious mosque of *Hagia Sophia* of Constantinople. It gives the impression that one is tucked into a womb. The womb of Mary is that of God and that of the universe. The mystical theology of God's condescending (*kenosis*) is typical of the Orthodox Church. God and the creature meet in Christ. Divinity and humanity are united in Christ, divinity and materiality in Nature. The universe is not sublimated into God but preserves materiality yet is divinized by participating in the divine life.

The Second group according to my classification is Mary with the child which can be subdivided into two types: the first is the Mother holding the child in either of her arms, and the second is the Mother who faces the spectators together with the child sitting on her lap, or standing and holding the child. Icons having been the tools to convey theological speculation, the emphasis here was shifted from Mary to the Christ child in the iconography of mother and child. Yet, the Mother remained depicted as much bigger than the child. After the close of the iconoclastic crisis, the tender motherliness was restored. Russians first met icons at this point in their development. I shall now look in detail at Mary of Vladimir, one of the most loved and venerated of all the Russian icons.

Holy Mother of Vladimir (picture 6)

The icon named Holy Mother of Vladimir is an old masterpiece of the Eleousa type. Although it is not the work of a Russian, it captured their hearts. It became a prototype of Russian icons and was widely copied through many centuries. Russian scholars after much argument reached

consensus that the faces of Mary and the child are the original from the Comnenus period in the twelfth century, and that the other parts were repeatedly restored.¹³⁾ After the storm of iconoclasm icon manufacture breathed a new life with the mode of spiritualism under the Comnenus dynasty. In general Russian icons have gentler and thinner eyes than Byzantine ones. Tradition tells that Luke the Evangelist was the painter of this icon. Although it cannot be proved historically it does prove the timeless devotion of the Russians. Mary's quiet, pensive look captures every soul that meets her. She is not looking at the child but towards us, and also far beyond us. This icon moved not only the hearts of the Russians but also that of the Japanese who came to know her.¹⁴⁾ It is now kept in the State Tretyakov Gallery.¹⁵⁾

According to the Kievan Chronicle, Mary of Vladimir came to Kiev soon after it had been painted in Constantinople. It arrived there by boat in the early twelfth century, but was moved in 1153/1155 to the chapel in Vladimir from which it took its name. Mary's face and hands are dark, not because of the soot caused by long years of burning candles but because the icons were generally painted in dark brown which symbolized blood, the stream of life. We can read the abbreviated letters of Meter Theou (mother of God in Greek) at both sides of her head, and IC XC (Jesus Christ in Russian) above the head of the child in faint red. Mary wears a tunic covering her head and shoulders. She does not show her hair which symbolized physical strength. Three stars are the signs of her triple virginity, before, during and after delivery. These stars decorate the tunic on her head and shoulders.¹⁶⁾ Mary, holding the child in her right arm, is pointing to him with her left hand. The child is embracing the mother holding her neck with his left arm under her cape. His body line forms the letter X, his own sign, in tune with the curve of his body line. This is considered to be the characteristic of Russian iconographic art at its peak.¹⁷⁾ The child looks at his mother's eyes pressing his cheek against hers, while she does not respond to his tender caress. Her gaze does not stop at her Son but goes beyond, reaching to the existential suffering of humans, corresponding to her Son's Passion. Mary's compassion embraces the fears

and struggles, pain and anguish caused by the human condition. Kiev was disrupted about eighty years after Mary of Vladimir was moved to Moscow. Most of Russia was invaded by the Mongols in 1240A.D. except for Novgorod in the north. Moscow itself was attacked three times but was miraculously rescued through the icon's protection. The Eastern Church celebrates those days in remembrance of her patronage.¹⁸⁾ Mary reveals the maternal face of God made hidden due to the traditional androcentric notion of God. Holy Mother of Vladimir accepts her child's caress, but does not monopolize his love. The mother-child relationship of this icon suggests her urge for him, and through him all men, to become independent of the mother figure. The mother's eyes reach all humans and linger on the oppressed and the exploited of the world throughout all ages.

Mary's Icon in the Contemporary world

An icon is the mirror that reflects the heart of God. The figure looks straight so that people can respond. Facing directly one to the other, they enter into an I-thou relationship. An icon does not merely reflect the Divine but invites us to divinization, that is, to be in tune with the Divine: in tune with the will and the desire, the grace and life of the Divine. An icon thus contains the dynamics of change. Divinization is a daring thought particular to Russian spirituality. It does not remain only as a theological speculation. It is a way of life and its ultimate goal.

Various types of the iconography of Mary became a source of inspiration for religious paintings of the West. While Eleousa was the most favoured among the Russians, Europeans liked the *Glykophilusa* type that shows the tenderness of the Mother without a sorrowful look, or the *Galaktotrophusa* type of Mary giving milk to her child. The influence of the Renaissance is overt in the paintings of the West: with the contemporary architecture and scenery as its background, Mary sits exposing her breast and the child completely naked. It is a good contrast with the modest icons. Iconographies in the West developed into secular art with religious themes depicting a beautiful Caucasian mother and her child. They



Pic. 10 Madonna of Czenstochowa



Pic. 11 Mother of the Disappeared
(Robert Lentz)

could hardly keep the essence of the icons.

Here I would like to introduce two positive influences of the icon of Mary beyond the Eastern world. The black Madonna of Czestochowa who attracts the ardent devotion of the Polish people (picture 10) was originally a *Hodigitria* icon in the fifth century in Constantinople. On Mary's right cheek, there is a big scar. Some say that this was caused by a robbery in the fifteenth century. However, many Polish believe that she was wounded by the Swedish when Poland desperately defended itself against the invasion of the Protestant Swedish army in the seventeenth century. In 1920, Poland recaptured independence from Russia, Austria and Prussia that had divided Polish territory. After Poland was closed off by the Iron Curtain, the Black Madonna became a patron of the Solidarity movement which resisted the Socialist government. The annual pilgrimage to Czestochowa which started in 1711 now numbers over a million people. These pilgrims take more than a week preceding the feast of the Assumption of Mary, August the 15th, to walk to the shrine from Warsaw. Includ-

ing believers and non-believers, they walk two hundred and fifty kilometers singing and praying all the way. Their sturdy faith is rooted in their devotion to Mary whose heart is bigger than the boundaries of ideology or religious denomination. Those who suffer most under war and political upheaval are neither the kings nor princes, nor the military commanders. They are the soldiers who fight in the front, farmers with their villages burned and their fields devastated, and the women who lose their husbands and/or sons, and are often raped. Mary knows the depth of human sorrow, the destitution of the lowly. Mary is an alternative divine face, hidden under the shadow of God the Father. The eponym of the Madonna of Czestochowa is the Mother of the great harvest, and her feast replaces that of Artemis which was celebrated prior to the conversion to Christianity.¹⁹⁾

The Madonna of Czestochowa was not restricted to Poland alone. A copy has been highly venerated as Our Lady of Czestochowa in the church which stands in solitary magnificence at the outskirts of San Antonio in Texas in the United States. Numerous refugees from Latin America gather here. They have run away penniless from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador and have crossed Mexico into the United States. They have been robbed along the way, or their money extorted. They applied for political asylum in the States at the federal office of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) which changed its policy over and over again so that those who classified as illegal aliens grew rapidly and turned the Rio Grande Valley into a sort of chaos. Being political refugees, they could not survive if they went back, nor could they earn money in the country of asylum. Properly speaking, Rio Grande Valley is not a valley, but is a hot, broad coastal plain 27 degree north of the Equator. Mary is the only and real support for the poorest, the most vulnerable and the weak. Mary is also the source of strength for those who suffer with these immigrants by finding a way out for them. Mary stands with them all against adverse wind for the sake of justice and love.

Another example can be seen in the madre de los Desaparecidos, the Mother of the Disappeared in Latin America (picture 11). She was the

source of power for the mothers whose sons were kidnapped and who disappeared at the hands of the military government. This is actually a poster, a creative modern icon grounded on the conviction that Mary was not passive: her passivity is but our unenlightened creation. This Madonna follows the classical style as to her initials at the top of each corner of the painting and three stars on the dress. But her cape is changed to a neckerchief, the child to a crown of thorns. She is depicted against the background of the Latin American jungle to indicate her local inculturation. Mary's face looks calm but tormented. The white handprint at the lower left hand corner is the mark of the death squad. The moment you find this handprint on your door, you should abandon the house to save your life. There is a point at which the spiritual and political intersect. This poster exploded out of this junction. Mary herself receives the death squad on her icon to indicate her solidarity with the disappeared. Through the help of this modern icon the mothers stopped being fearful and powerless, and decided to face injustice bravely. The resistance of Latin American mothers started in Argentine in 1977, demanding the release of their children and husbands who had disappeared. They demonstrated every week. Becoming the target of the military, some of them were snatched away and were never heard of again. These mothers were despised as crazy. In spite of all this, they were undaunted. After seven years, these mothers were not only praised as heroines but the movement spread to El Salvador and to Chile.²⁰⁾ The mothers received strength from the One who looks down upon the lowly and acts mightily (Luke 1:48-53).

All the goddesses of the ancient world converged in Mary in Roman Christendom. The devotion to Mary spread naturally in Russia which had the traditional worship of the Great Earth Mother. The Christian Church defined Mary as Virgin Mother, which had been the prerogative of the ancient goddesses. Although the Church affirmed that Mary was not a goddess but a historical personage, there never had existed before a woman who kept perpetual virginity before, during and after childbirth, and then was physically taken up to heaven after death. Mary was worthy of being Christ's mother in the true sense of the word just by being an ex-

ceptional woman. This was a doctrine which was adequately warranted in the classical Mediterranean world, although incomprehensible today. To take back for Mary her rightful human nature is complementary to rectifying sexism in society. The Mother of Vladimir looks with compassion on the situation and the fate of women everywhere throughout history.

The Christian God was metaphorically represented by the figures of king, ruler and judge as well as father in the patriarchal society. This was the image projected by man expressing his ideal status and role in society. God is the head of all creatures, so, man is the head of any social group. The reality of woman, on the contrary, is in striking contrast to that of man. Being unable to live independently, a girl had to submit to the decision of her father in the choice of her mate, and was only recognised after bearing a son. Virginity was demanded of her before marriage and chastity after, but it was overlooked for man and he could even have other wives and/or keep women outside. The double standard of sexual morality in practice was hardly questioned. Moreover women were considered as unclean because of menstruation and child delivery. Having taken the situation of women into account, it is natural that Mary had to be an exception, because it was impossible to project such an image of woman to Mary. Since all women were regarded unclean, Mary had to be immaculate in order to bear her son, Christ Jesus. When God was regarded as a Judge, people were in need of a tender mother goddess to intercede for them. In the Christian Church that forbade any God other than the Triune God, Mary, while keeping her humanity, took over the place of the goddess. According to the Mosaic law, the image of God should never be carved, hence in early Christianity there were no human representations of Christ. However, iconographies of Mary were abundantly drawn and carved and ardently venerated. In the West her images tend to be that of a tender, pure, young and beautiful Caucasian woman, while the Latin Americans draw her to be a dynamic, sturdy and black woman who gets angry towards injustice and urges people to take action, because they regard Mary, who is compassionate and wise, to be on the side of the oppressed and exploited. Japanese seem to have fully accepted the former tradition

and to be hardly aware of the latter. Is not the latter Mary the true and authentic type?

When we realize how closely icons are connected with the religious life of the Russian people, we can understand why the Orthodox Church claims them back from the state. But if the Church persists only in the rightful ownership of icons that were lost after the Communist revolution, a danger can creep in. Also, if she persists in keeping the doctrine as formulated more than a thousand years ago as absolute, she could be suffocated and lose sight of a vision for the future. The words of wisdom of the Metropolitan of St.Petersburg ring in my ears. "What is most important for us is openness. We must not allow our chapels to become antique shops". This is not to forsake the tradition, nor to cling to it. It is a difficult task to discern what is traditional from what is conventional. An icon is certainly something unique in the Eastern Church. As a heritage of human culture, can icons share their meaning with us, enriched by Eastern spirituality? Can we not find icons in contemporary graphical art or shots on TV? The scene of the reconciliation of those who were antagonistic for so long? Seemingly futile fighting against discrimination and hatred? A starving Somalian baby? If an icon contains a message of change and divinization, would not those images that urge us to change be icons in the real sense?²¹⁾

Unfortunately Christianity was split into East and West. We should remember that in the first millenium we were one. The division in the second millenium taught us many painful lessons. Would that in the coming third millenium, we could leap beyond the split and open wide to the world! The Western Church needs reappraisal of the theology of the Holy Spirit, since this theology was a cause of the division. Moreover both Churches have tight androcentric structures of dogma, liturgy and hierarchical system. To change the paradigms and find a way forward may take a long time, but it is a most liberating task. Like those that went before us we need to draw life and energy from the divine motherhood, the source of wisdom, as these are required in abundance in the present world.

NOTES

- 1) In the Russian orthodox Church the title of *theotokos* (Mother of God) has been mostly used for Mary since the council of Ephesus. In the Western Churches, several titles such as mother of God, holy Mary, our Lady, Blessed Virgin etc. have been used. Considering the fact that Mary existed before all these titles were conferred upon her, I shall use Mary throughout this article.
- 2) Although Teracotta figurines of women raising their arms in the style of *orante* are typical of the predynastic Egypt, the same type is found in Crete and among similar Minoan cultures in 2nd millennium, and also in Mesopotamia. They seem to have connection with the cult of the dead. The *orante* represents the posture of intercessory prayer for the dead. The frescoes of the *orante* in the catacombs before 3rd century are considered to be the representation of the souls in Heaven. From 3rd century on, the paintings bear the name of Mary. The mid-4th century paintings show that Mary was definitely venerated. Together with the figure of Christ as *Pancreator*, Mary came to be known as a great *Panagia* (a great holy one). See Neumann, Erich, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, Princeton University Press, 1972, pp.114-119.
- 3) Ouspensky, Leonid, *Theology of the Icon*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992, vol.1, p.73.
- 4) Hamada, Yasuko, *Icon no Sekai*, Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1979, pp.39-41. Iwayama, Saburō, *Kodai no Botsuraku to Bijutsu: Miira Shōzōga to sono Jidai*, Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1973, in full details.
- 5) The writings of the following Fathers testify that they warned against the iconography. Tertullian (160-240/250A.D.), Clemens of Alexandria (150- 216 A.D.), Origen (185/186-254/255A.D.), Eusebius of Caesaria (265-339/340A.D.).
- 6) Benko, Stephen, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan & Christian Roots of Mariology*, E.J. Brill, 1993, pp. 245-262.
- 7) See the following for Helena. Drijvers, Jan Willem, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross*, E.J. Brill, 1972.
- 8) Ouspensky, as on note 3, pp. 107-117.
- 9) The controversy over Christology in the Eastern Church was concluded. But in the West, it has been discussed anew as a contemporary problem of theology, and in search of appropriate definition befitted to present day thinking.
- 10) Iconostasis divides the sanctuary and the nave. It was originally a low fence. After it was developed into a banister, an icon was placed on it. It gradually got higher until it finally became a wall dividing the sanctuary and the nave leaving a central door for the priests to go in and out. Icons were placed into the wall according to the regulations. After Christianity entered Russia, the iconostasis was stratified twofold and then threefold. The top of the ico-

- nostasis signifies Heaven and the bottom earth showing the gradual meeting of God and humans.
- 11) See Fedotov, G.P., *The Russian Religious Mind, Kievan Christianity: the 10th to the 13th Century*, Harper Torch Book, 1960, pp.360-362.
 - 12) Bransch, Kurt, *Icon*, (Jap. trans) Sansai-sha, 1966, pp.30-33.
 - 13) We now know that it was restored in the 13th and 14th centuries, in the early 16th century and the 19th century. It was most recently washed in 1918 when it came under state control. Matunaga, Goichi, *Seisei no kagami*, Heibonsha, 1981, p.160.
 - 14) I find so many Japanese authors on Eastern Orthodox art referring to this icon saying that they have been fascinated by it.
 - 15) After 1918, many church buildings and works of art were transferred from the Orthodox Church to Communist State control. After the recent reform, they are gradually being returned to the Church. There is a continuous hot discussion whether to return all for liturgical use or preserve some of them under the State management to serve the public as cultural assets. This icon, Holy Mother of Vladimir, is in the midst of this dispute. In the year 1993, the Patriarch of Moscow celebrated liturgy in front of this in the gallery.
 - 16) Takahasi, Masayuki, *Icon no Katachi*, Shunjū-sha, 1992, p.100.
 - 17) Ouspensky, Leonid and Lossky, Vladimir, *The Meaning of Icons*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982, p.96.
 - 18) Three feast days are the following: August 26th to commemorate the deliverance in 1395 and June 23rd for 1480; May 21st is doubly commemorated: the restoration of the icon in 1514 and the deliverance from the Mongols in 1521.
 - 19) See Galland, China, *Longing for Darkness: Tara and the Black Madonna*, Penguin Books, 1990, pp.197-232.
 - 20) See *Ibid.*, pp.247-277.
 - 21) I owe my insight to Dr. Laurie McRobert for her unpublished paper "Ukraine and the Iconic Imagination" as well as the discussion held at the dinner table in St. Petersburg.