

HISTORY OF ICONOGRAPHY

✦ Christian art began in the Catacombs

✦ Being a forbidden religion, great faith was required of followers. Hence we find themes recalling martyrs, the intervention of God in the Old Testament on behalf of His chosen people: Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc.

✦ With Constantine's victory over Maxentius in 312 Christianity came out of the catacombs and began replacing pagan public art. Artists were now commissioned to work openly for the new religion which soon became the official religion of the Roman empire.

✦ In 330 Constantinople (Istanbul today) became the new capital of the empire and was soon to become a holy city. Constantine built many churches.

✦ 6th century with reign of Justinian we have what is known as the "Golden Age" of the Byzantine world. It was at that time an empire that included most of the Mediterranean basin.

Hagia Sophia is built in Constantinople and other magnificent churches in Ravenna and Jerusalem are built.

✦ In 7th Century the church issues its first of many to follow canons on the icons of the faith. Christ was not to no longer be represented symbolically but to show his humanity to manifest the Incarnation through which he redeemed the world.

✦ 8th century Emperor Leo III bans icons of Christ and other saints. The Church resists, icons are destroyed, innumerable monks were imprisoned, tortured and mutilated. Monasteries were sacked and burned. Islam was pressing in on the empire and Arabs and Jews created political pressure.

✦ Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 defends the use of icons with numerous theological arguments.

✦ More violence over issue in early 9th century during reign of Emperor Leo V.

✦ In 847 the issue was finally settled. This is known as the triumph of Orthodoxy. This event is celebrated to this day on the first Sunday of Lent.

✦ Cappadocia in center of Asia Minor in what is now Turkey, Christian art flourishes.

✦ With the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 to the Turks, Churches were converted to mosques and much Christian art was destroyed.

✦ Orthodoxy has new Golden age in Russia after liberation from Tartar oppression. We have many new schools of Iconography in Russia including the famous Rublev who is considered to be the greatest of Russian artists.