

The Ecclesiastical Mosaic

SYNTERESE

(Dedicated to the 520 Occupied Churches of Cyprus)

Father Demosthenes Demosthenous

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Fig 1. *Returning (detail of SYNTERESE (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 2020, mosaic)). Akropoli-Strovolos. Courtesy of Father Demosthenes Demosthenous.*



Fig 2. The occupied monastery of Apostle Barnabas, founder of the Church of Cyprus (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 2017). Nicosia.

The theologian serves the Church and, at the same time, he is a teacher. He is an iconographer of the sanctity of the human face.

Special importance is attached to his work in schools, as young souls are prepared to become acquainted with the deeper relationship between man and his fellow man and God. He focusses on the shaping and development of the temperament of young people on the basis of Christian virtue.

Up until half a century ago, there were only a few theologians in Cyprus. Since then, there has been a significant increase in the number of theologians in Cyprus, both in the clergy and in the laity. Thus, our martyred island benefits from a more complete service to the Church and pedagogy based on the modern spiritual requirements and educational needs.

Around the middle of the last century, theologians in western countries usually came from the clergy, while in Hellas and Cyprus theologians came mainly from the laity. This is why the Theological Schools of Hellas established the Department of Pastoral Theology, as they aimed to provide clergymen with a theological education. Respectively, the Theological School of Cyprus, 'Apostolos Barnabas', which has operated since 1948, established a new two-year Advanced Course in 1968, while in 2015 the Church of Cyprus founded the Theological School of the Church of Cyprus so as to provide both the clergy and the laity with university-level theological training.

Orthodox theologians, whether clergy or laity, are considered as primarily serving the Church, because their mission in both cases is always to promote the purposes of the Church with regard to the transmission of the Divine Word and the supremacy of Christian ideals. In this sense, the theologian, either as a clergyman or layman, as a preacher, as a missionary, or as a teacher, is the Church's instrument of teaching, the bearer of the Christian sermon, the teacher and the educator, whose mission is sacred and high, and his work is diverse and difficult.¹

1 Nearchos Nearchou (ed), *Άπαντα Αρχιεπ. Μακαρίου Γ' (The Complete Works of Archbishop Makarios III)* vol 8 (1965) 127.



Fig 3. Saint Kassianos (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 2016). Nicosia.

Theology is neither strictly a theoretical nor an exact science. In fact, the theologian is not a scientist in the sense of having a lot of knowledge that he will use to formally achieve his work. The theologian is mainly an apostle. In addition to the encyclopaedic knowledge, there are many other qualifications and qualities that are actually required for the theologian to succeed in his mission. For this reason, iconography par excellence explains the sanctity and the inviolability of the person with an austerity that possesses the richness of thousands of words.

'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men', Christ said, calling His first disciples and apostles.² Through these words of the calling of the first apostles, we can define the work and the mission of the theologians. They are 'fishers of men', 'fishers of souls' in the stormy sea of life.³

Man, as a person, is a divine creation. The image of man is a primary concern of the Church. After all, Christ lights the spark of Christian life in our psychic world. However, the task of preserving the spiritual life falls upon our shoulders as well, so that we may ensure that we have preserved Grace and be glorified when the Lord calls us to depart from this world, having kept the treasure of the 'life in Christ' safe and

2 Matthew 4:18–19 (English Standard Version 2007).

3 Nearchou (ed, n 1).



Fig 4. Christ and the apostles Peter and Andrew (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 2015) High School of Empa, Paphos.

sound.⁴ We always need the strengthening from the Grace of God, which is faithfully reflected in the Holy Icons, and these have a very rich theological content. The ancient icons are evidence of the piety of our ancestors who, through struggles and often with sacrifices, have bequeathed to us the faith and the path of salvation.

Moreover, the Holy Icons, in what the iconographer had in mind and in what is accepted by faithful Christians, are a practical manifestation of the inner experience of the Christian faith. Very often, they were painted by anonymous iconographers and prove the artistic power of the Christian religion, which has no equal in the entire history of man, primarily because it possesses a spirituality enlightened by the Triadic God. That is the reason why the Holy Icons have a leading role, since through their spiritual teaching and theology they constitute a testimony of faith and art at the same time. They are a tangible proof of the piety of our ancestors here in Cyprus.

Since the Turkish invasion in 1974 to this very day, almost 37 per cent of Cyprus has been occupied with the aid of the Turkish army. There remained 23,000 ecclesiastical icons found in the 520 occupied churches of Cyprus that date from the twelfth century to the twentieth.⁵ The Greeks of the Republic of Cyprus became refugees because of the primitive violation of the fundamental principles of morality, clearly expressed with the violation of human dignity. Almost all the ecclesiastical treasures were looted or destroyed, while works of ecclesiastical art and of great spiritual value were destroyed or crushed down to the size of a few centimetres.⁶

The Church of Cyprus, through the peaceful diligence of its flock, is fighting for the restoration of morality and justice, and is ready to reconstitute artistically what was lost during the barbaric Turkish invasion and the ongoing occupation.⁷

4 St Nicholas Cabasilas, *Η Χριστιανική Ζωή (The Life in Christ)* (Nicosia 2008) 56.

5 Father Dionysios Papachrystoforou, Report as *Director of the Restoration Centre of Ancient Icons, Holy Archdiocese of Cyprus in the Holy Monastery of Saint Spyridon of Tremetousia* (Archives of Holy Archdiocese of Cyprus, March 1975).

6 Father Demosthenes Demosthenous (speech to the European Parliament, April 2007).

7 8 Συντήρηση-Εικονογραφία-Τέχνη (Restoration-Iconography-Art) (2018) 8.



Fig 5. The occupied Metropolitan Church of Arhangelos in Kyrenia. Photograph: Stavros Mihaelides.



Fig 6. The occupied Church of Agios Mamas, Syghari. Photograph: Stavros Mihaelides.



Fig 7. Detail of SYNTERESE (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 2020, mosaic). Akropoli-Strovolos. Courtesy of Father Demosthenes Demosthenous.



Fig 8. Father Demosthenes Demosthenous pictured with his ecclesiastical mosaic SYNTERESE (2020). Akropoli-Strovolos. Courtesy of Father Demosthenes Demosthenous.

The ecclesiastical mosaic *SYNTERESE* depicts the theme of the 520 occupied Cypriot churches in a border area like Cyprus, but where there has never been a religious confrontation or war, at any time in the turbulent history of the island. The interpretation of the mosaic titled 'Theological Restoration in Memory of Andreas Mitsidis', which we made at the Second Technical and Vocational School of Education and Training in Nicosia in 2018, is a key landmark for theology in Cyprus's struggle for survival.⁸

The art of charity

'Τέχνη φιλανθρωπίας' (the 'art of charity') is a theological phrase especially loved by Saint Maximus the Confessor in his correspondence to Marinos, a seventh-century Bishop of Cyprus. Saint Maximus expresses himself in the triptych: Triadic God; man; will. In this way he interprets the divine ingenuity with regard to salvation, so that man, with his personality crushed by sin, may move

⁸ 'Theological Restoration in Memory of Andreas Mitsidis' (2020) 19
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towards the work of restoration leading to the deeper recognition of sanctity and the inviolability of the human face. Here, too, Byzantine iconography is a pioneer; this was a century and a half even before the Second Council of Nicaea.

With regard to the personal human being

The liberating character of Christianity is seen in liberation from egocentrism through the observance of the Divine Law.

Vanity repels the wealth of justice, while humility disperses the multitude of passions, but if we lead our lives with humility, then, our Savior, help us to have the fate of the Tax Collector.⁹

During the period of Great Lent, we experience the preparation for the great Despotism of the Passion, the Crucifixion, and especially the Resurrection of our Christ. Drawing lessons from this helps shape experience in favour of virtue, intertwined with law on the basis of respect for ethics. We call upon our memory the parables of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee, and of the Prodigal Son by Luke the Evangelist, and we connect these with the difficulties of daily life. Freedom is a gift from God and a natural right, which no one can deprive us of in Cyprus, as it includes a moral spirit and moral values, expressing the sound principles of our culture, which is based on peace and the ancient tradition of the Cypriot craftsman.

In March 1983, the first exhibition of such icons was held at the Centro Internazionale Giorgio La Pira, in Florence. 50 works and icons, painted in the traditional style by Father Demosthenes Demosthenous, became the first breath of the re-creation of those Holy Icons destroyed during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. As these are experiences of modern religious and national life, this presupposes the ideals of justice and freedom. It's necessary that law and freedom are expressions of harmony between man, his fellow man, and God.¹⁰ Furthermore, political and spiritual life is developed based on the loving coexistence and the uniqueness of each person as sacred.

Moral freedom liberates us from sin and takes on unimaginable extensions in the world of knowledge and art in imitation of the divine-human art of charity. In response to the universal request of the moral man, we attest in the Church that the use of hymn and psalm together with iconography is a real expression of recognition of the image of God and His Grace as a unique original.

Any historic disturbance of equilibrium is temporary, because equality between human persons (one person, one vote) is restored through Christianity. Because, with the preaching of the God-man, the parallel pair, the twin pair of the principles of justice and freedom is irrevocably placed on the basis of love. As a criterion and guide of our actions, the God-man commands love.¹¹

That is, love and respect for God and for man. In the spirit of such consensus, the concepts of justice and freedom are inherent as an anxious state of vigilance and struggle when these elements are absent. Love without justice is inconceivable. Accordingly,

⁹ From the *orthros* for the Sunday of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee.

¹⁰ Nearchou (ed, n 1).

¹¹ Konstantinos Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη (Medieval Library)* 2 (Venice 1873) 1-2; Andreas Mitsidis, *Σύντομη Ιστορία Εκκλησίας Κύπρου (Short History of the Church of Cyprus)*, (Nicosia 1986) 43, citing Neophytos the Recluse, 'Περὶ τῶν κατὰ χώραν Κύπρον σκaiών' (On the shadows over Cyprus) in *Ecclesiastical Letters during Francocracy*.



Fig 9. Ελευθερία '38 (Freedom '38) (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 2016, mosaic). High School of Palouriotissa, Nicosia. Courtesy of Father Demosthenes Demosthenous.

justice without freedom cannot exist. This is identified with the character of Christianity in relation to the Orthodox life and practice that extends between the Byzantine Orthodox culture and the corresponding Russian.¹²

As St John Chrysostom argued, God created man not to be a slave but free.¹³ That explains the law of moral conscience and the Christian ethos of peaceful restoration.

The Christian faith is primarily interested in freeing man from the bondage of sin, in liberating him internally, but does not remain indifferent to his overall freedom.

Therefore, the foundations of modern Greek society are divine justice and human freedom.¹⁴ They maintain the intact and immovable component in the universal consciousness, which does not wish for the power of supremacy seen in the works of Machiavelli and Nietzsche, but for the consistency in managing the challenge for a clearer picture of the future, based on pure vigilance so as to preserve the testimony of origin and its revitalization through art.¹⁵

Under conditions of blackmail, hostage-taking or captivity (as in the consequences of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974), abandonment of sought material goods may be understood. But the abandonment of moral principles and rights is dishonourable and unacceptable.¹⁶ That explains the prestige of Byzantine iconography with its timeless spiritual dimension. This is especially true under conditions of struggle



Fig 10. Painter-iconographer Andreas Chrysochos gives advice on the realisation of a work. Second Technical School, Nicosia. Courtesy of Father Demosthenes Demosthenous.

for freedom. Such a struggle has the vote of God and a lot of moral support for the enslaved people by the spiritual people, who largely guide the course of the stand for freedom, in a peaceful and peace-making way. An example of this is the school of painting that was developed in Cyprus, especially after the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, with one of the protagonists, Andreas Chrysochos, who studied the art of painting in England.

The dream retains as its characteristics the impossible and at the same time the tangible, accessible reality. In a time of slavery or incomplete freedom (such as the continuation of the invasion and occupation from 1974 until today), the only option left to us is the remembrance of the sacred and holy elements of our civilisation and our 520 occupied churches.

Respect for our parents and ancestors alone is not enough. It is urgent to practise at all times the customs, the morals, and the traditions kept by our parents and our Holy Fathers with the assistance of the Church and our language, in an unceasing and uninterrupted continuity since the very last day of life before the arrival of the invaders.

As an example, we state the case of the Diassorinos family, and especially Iakovos Diassorinos (in the thirteenth–sixteenth centuries).¹⁷

The ideals remain active in the psychic world of those fighting, especially when they are alive and cultured. They offer a clear and critical look at the constant challenges posed by the invaders for concessions and discounts from freedom and intimacy with one's own character, which are components that affirm the value of every struggle for freedom. As long as they persist, blackmailing remains; and the lack of freedom is oppressively extended towards darkness.

¹² Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London 1934–54); Theodoros Papadopoulos, Presentation (1958); Arnold Toynbee, 'The Theory of the Genesis of Civilizations' in *Tribute to Konstantinos Spyridakis* (Nicosia 1964) 159.

¹³ St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* (written fourth century, John Henry Parker 1848).

¹⁴ *ibid* 160.

¹⁵ Marios Begzos, *Δοκίμια Φιλοσοφίας της θρησκείας* (*Essays on Philosophy of Religion*) (Athens 1988) 21.

¹⁶ Andreas Mitsidis, *Άπαντα Αρχιεπ. Μακ. Γ' (The Complete Works of Archbishop Makarios III)* 8 643 (1965, Nicosia 1997)

¹⁷ Fighters who maintained the Greek Byzantine Tradition, seen for example in the frescoes of the Diassorinos in the Medieval Church of Arhangelos in Pedoulas. See Theodoros Papadopoulos, *Ιστορία της Κύπρου-Μεσαιωνικό Βασίλειο* (*History of Cyprus-Medieval Kingdom*) D'–A' (Nicosia 1995) 537.



Fig 11. The Occupied Holy Monastery of Agios Paneleimonas, Myrtou (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 2018, mosaic). Second Technical School, Nicosia. Courtesy of Father Demosthenes Demosthenous.

However, the human soul does not compromise with this, since the lack of freedom is an insult to the unbreakable continuity of culture and to the natural relationship with our parents and ancestors, which is understood through the purity of soul, thought and mind. Therefore, it is an indisputable destiny: first of all, it's necessary to believe in the moral principles given to us by the minds of those who fought before us for the same purpose of freedom. The refugees of Cyprus, during their exile within their own country, died and were buried (without wishing for such a development) away from their ancestral homes, the occupied cities of Kyrenia, Famagusta, or Morphou. Most art and painting exhibitions after 1974 have dealt with this tragic situation with representative icons.

It is an experience that constitutes a national heritage, which has been threatened since the summer of 1974, when the Turkish troops landed, violating all forms of law in Cyprus, along with violating every principle of morality. This is clearly confirmed by the deprivation of worship and any contact with the 520 occupied churches of our parents and ancestors.¹⁸

Since the establishment in 1983 of the Laboratory for the Restoration of Ancient Icons, Paintings, and Manuscripts of the Holy Archdiocese

¹⁸ Reverend Demosthenes Demosthenous DDr, *The Occupied Churches of Cyprus* (Nicosia 2000) 6.



Fig 12. First page of the Gospel of the Cathedral of Cyprus (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 2020). Nicosia. Courtesy of Father Demosthenes Demosthenous.

of Cyprus, the Director, Father Demosthenes Demosthenous, DDr, has witnessed the receipt of destroyed or irreparably damaged ecclesiastical icons and sacred objects, which had remained intact until the events of the 1974 Turkish invasion. These sacred objects, although in poor condition, attest to the descriptive speech of Archbishop Makarios III at the United Nations in October 1974.¹⁹ They include a Holy Chalice with cast metal handle from the occupied area north of Nicosia and pieces of an iconostasis from the area of Morphou. Unfortunately, the invaders never cooperated honestly in the matter of the origin of the destroyed relics, which ended up through various ways in hands of the Holy Archdiocese of Cyprus, mainly with the assistance of the Police of the Republic.

The restoration and promotion of the ecclesiastical heritage of Cyprus includes the following as well: calligraphy and miniature iconographies, included in the art of the Gospel of the Cathedral, which was made by Father Demosthenous and commissioned by the Blessed Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostom II. The manuscript, written on a parchment measuring 50 x 70cm, with 80 miniature representations and about 400 decorated chapters and chapter titles, was completed in 2020 in memory of Father Spyridon Demosthenous—Good Samaritan—and of the 520 occupied churches of Cyprus.

¹⁹ Reverend Demosthenes Demosthenous DDr, *The Occupied Churches of Cyprus* (Nicosia 2001).



Fig 13. 'The Calling of Matthew', Folio 15 of the Gospel of the Cathedral of Cyprus (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 2020). Nicosia. Courtesy of Father Demosthenes Demosthenous.

We, the refugees, in this long-term effort for the justification of Cyprus and the completion of its freedom, keep as a model in our minds the struggle of our saints and ascetics, such as that of Saint Sozomenos in Potamia, an abandoned village located within the Dead Zone, which in fact bears the name of the saint and in the past was mixed (that is, it used to be inhabited both by Greeks and Turks of Cyprus). In the *kekragaria* (ecclesiastic hymns) of the saint we read:

[Y]ou lived in the cave, flying in the silence, defeating the passion with the efforts of temperance and hard work, showing patience against the temptations and perseverance against the various circumstances.²⁰

When the hymnographer mentions the word 'circumstances', he means the adversities caused by the arbitrariness of the conquerors.

And elsewhere below, we read in the next *troparion*:

You shone like the sun in the cave, Saved (Sozomenos), illuminating all those who ran to you and invoked your help, oh Wise one.

The intercession of the saints of our Orthodox Church offers an unexpected spiritual strength to the claim for restoration of the occupied churches of Cyprus. Repentance on our part, along with spiritual exercise, makes us follow Christ, having a warm mind, as did Saint Sozomenos, who is now on the throne of the omnipotent God and intercedes for all of us who invoke him, so that we may receive help and assistance from God.

Kathisma (ecclesiastic hymn):

With your words you decorated the Church of Christ, with your works you honoured the fact that you were created as an image of God, oh Saint Sozomenos, as your wisdom shone in the world with the grace of healing, in the radiance of faith, and therefore we honour your memory with much affection.

²⁰Holy Archdiocese of Cyprus, *Κύπρια Μηναία* (Monthly Cypriot News) 3 (Nicosia 1996) 192.



Fig 14. Iconography of the Dome (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 1998). Church of Agios Makarios, Nairobi. Courtesy of Father Demosthenes Demosthenous.

The hymn clearly reveals the inseparable relation of spirituality to the national consciousness, together with the respect for moral principles. The ancient frescoes, probably of the eighth century AD, preserved in the cave of Saint Sozomenos, in the village having the same name, are proof of the spiritual wealth that pilgrims gain. Whether they are literate or illiterate, they all have the same spiritual benefit and education. Such is the power of iconography—an iconography that continues to serve in its mission up to this day.

In 12 missions of iconography and its teaching between 1995 and 2008, courses of theory and technique of Byzantine Iconography were delivered at the Patriarchal School of Archbishop Makarios III in Nairobi, Kenya. The iconographies in the Church of Agios Makarios were painted by Father Demosthenous and students of the School.

The true exponent of the truth is the one who serves it with freedom and justice. It gives meaning to the words that in the mouth of others, even orators, seem misguided and unrealisable, when the latter are vested with neither bravery nor virtue, nor spiritual power.

The proper exponent reaches up to the realisation of the restoration work. Thus, his virtue and bravery are proven, as a continuator of his origins and ancestry—that is, to be a servant of the moral spirit and moral values.²¹

In fact, such virtue guarantees the natural continuity of the spiritual civilization, and not only on the basis of the law of origin; these are elements which need special preservation.²² What we say, in the moral law of the Gospel, is perfectly natural. In the minds of the media, perhaps this is seen as simply normal. The love for consistency with the ancestry of the Person on the

²¹'And our King, those letters which they considered as dead, he himself carries them out with strength and vitality, projecting through his own power, the true and brave valour, not the false one ... Virtue and valour ... was perhaps the father for his child and the child for the father, good for the good' in Paul Gautier (ed), *The Letters of Theophylactus of Ochrida* (Thessalonica 1980) 217.

²²'[T]his state of good heart did they have and, thus, defeated not only the enemies but also time' Paul Gautier (ed), *The Letters of Theophylactus of Ochrida* (Thessalonica 1980) 219.



Fig 15. Christ Pantocrator (Father Demosthenes Demosthenous 1982). Church of Sant'Andrea (Via Sardegna 153), Rome. Courtesy of Father Demosthenes Demosthenous.

basis of His origins is identified with the religious awe; while the emotional superficial resemblance to beauty is subjective, a preference that expresses the conquest of self-extension that is being attempted is not.²³

The iconographies that Father Demosthenous painted in Agios Dimitrios of the Acropolis (1983–2021), in Agios Andreas, Via Sardegna 153 in Rome (1981–96) and elsewhere, are just small examples of the spiritual militancy and vigilance of the population which is the Greek Orthodox Christians of Cyprus, waiting until they can live freely in the 520 churches of their parents and ancestors, which are occupied and date from the era of Constantine the Great.

²³ Andreas Chrysochos, *Κείμενα για την Τέχνη* (Texts on Art) (Nicosia 2006) 51.