

Letters of Pope St. Gregory II (+731) to Emperor Leo Against Heresy of Iconoclasm

HO#51

This letter, by Pope St. Gregory II, was presumably written in the year 729. We can gather this because his speaks of St. Germanus of Constantinople as in his 95th year; and St. Germanus was born in 634, which would place this letter in the year 729. Hearing of the outrageous acts of blasphemy committed by the Emperor in the East, the desecration of sacred images, the expulsion of Orthodox priests, and the proclamation of the iconoclast heresy, St. Gregory and others assembled a sacred Synod in Rome in 727. At this Synod the iconoclast heresy was anathematized and condemned; for it was not in the thoughts of the fathers to dilly-dally to wait for some hypothetical ecumenical council to defend the truth; some council is sufficient to expound this truth rather than no council. In many cases, St. Gregory II illustrates great deference to the majesty of the Emperor, but this can only go so far. He warns him of the horrific and destructive course this heresy brings, not just upon the soul, but, upon the Emperor's own secular rule. For the nations of the West, which had been brought into relative harmony with the Empire, were greatly outraged at the killing of the several martyrs who suffered for icons; for many of these ambassadors, some newly converted, reported seeing several women martyred in the Emperor's presence for their defense of sacred images. Outrage followed in these countries; Ravenna, once loyal to the Emperor, had no use for a heretical ruler that would destroy their faith, and persecute their people, and thus welcome the Orthodox barbarian conquerors. The other nations, as St. Gregory II expounds, will not stand for the imposition of iconoclast heresy by the Emperor's armies; and, St. Gregory warns, should the Emperor try, he will find that the princes of the West will be ready to fight. In a few places, for what reasons I cannot gather, there are minor errors in the text. For some reason, for example, St. Gregory seems to ascribe Holy King David as bringing the brazen serpent into the Temple; though, it is possible this is a scribal error, or, the word 'temple' is being used in an overly broad sense; lastly, I suppose, it could be thought that a simply slip of mind happened in the hasty composition of St. Gregory's letter. But none of these make any real difference to the essential content of the text. St. Gregory II does, of course, bring up the issue of images of God the Father, which he is against. Though, even if one does not agree with this conclusion of his, it need not detract from the letter as a whole. It should be remembered, that, unfortunately, the Orthodox West's experience, in many cases, with Eastern Emperors was often not very positive. Having just seen nearly 50 years of Monothelite heresy, with attempts by Monothelite emperor to force heresy upon Orthodox Italians, etc., and now seeing the same attempts by Eastern Emperors to do the same, only one generation later, with Iconoclasm, the opinion of the Church in the West of Constantinople was brought even lower. This, unfortunately, created a bad atmosphere, not entirely justified, that created attitudes of suspicion toward anything arriving from Constantinople. The result was that the heretical emperors of the East themselves helped contribute a great deal to setting the groundwork for much of the political circumstances that contributed to the Great Schism of the West from Orthodoxy and apostasy of the same West into heresies. Nevertheless, at this time, Orthodox Rome, warned the emperor that the Orthodox popes occupy a place as mediator between the East and the West, and that by attacking Orthodox Rome, the Emperor continues to alienate the West. St. Gregory says he need only go 24 stadia outside the city, and they will never find him in the hills of Campania. The [translation is from Mendham's book](#). Although I cannot, of course, agree with Mendham's views, he does provide an accurate translation, despite his heterodox Anglican background. —Hieromonk Enoch

First Letter of Gregory the Second, Pope of Rome, to the Emperor Leo, in Defense of Images

The letters of your God-preserved Majesty and fraternity we received by Augustalis Spatharocandidatus during the whole of your reign from the fourteenth indiction: and, as we received the letters of this fourteenth and of the fifteenth, and of the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth indictions, we carefully preserved them in the Holy Church, laying them on the threshold of the Sanctuary of the Holy, Glorious, and Very Chiefest of the Apostles, Peter, where are also laid up the letters of other holy and pious Sovereigns, your predecessors. Now, in these first ten collections we find that thou didst well and piously, and as became a Sovereign, determine to observe and defend, without an omission, all the decrees and doctrines of our holy fathers and doctors. And, what was of the first importance, the writing was your own, and not that of another, safely sealed with the royal seal; and no less safe within were the signatures of your own hands, written in purple ink as is the royal custom, which laid before us your right and true confession concerning our Immaculate and Orthodox Faith: wherein, moreover, you were accustomed to add that he who undermines and destroys the definitions of the Fathers was accursed. Now, when we received these letters, we offered hymns of praise to God that he had thought fit to put the Empire into thine hands. Now, since ye ran so well, who hath rung this in thine ears and turned aside thine heart like a broken bow, that thou hast looked on things that were behind? For ten years, by the Grace of God, thou didst walk well and madest no mention of holy images; but now thou sayst they occupy the place of idols; that they who venerate them are idolators; and thou has determined on their utter destruction. And thou hast not feared the judgments of God in thus causing scandals to arise, not only in the heart

56 of the faithful, but of the unfaithful also. But Christ commands you not to offend any of His little ones, and declares
57 that, even for a slight scandal, you stand in danger of eternal fire. And hast thou scandalized the whole word
58 because thou hadst not courage to endure death, but hadst rather defend thyself by a sinful apology?
59 For thou hast written, "That we ought not to worship things made with hands, nor any image or likeness of things
60 in heaven or things on the earth, as the Lord hath said." And again: "Certify me who hath commanded us to
61 worship and adore things made with the hand, and I will confess it as the ordinance of God." Now why, as king and
62 head of Christians, did you not ask of those who knew and had experience, and from them seek confirmation
63 concerning what kind of things, made with the hand, God spake, before you stirred up, excited, and disturbed the
64 common people? Yea, you have driven away, you have denied and cast out, our holy fathers and doctors, whom,
65 with your own hand and your own writing, you have declared that you would obey and follow. Scripture is ours—
66 both light and salvation is ours—the holy and inspired fathers and teachers are ours; and this practice the Six Holy
67 Councils, which were in Christ, have handed down to us, and you receive not their testimony. It is necessary that
68 we write to you things gross and unlearned, since you are so unlearned yourself; but, nevertheless, they have in
69 them the truth and power of God. We exhort you, by God, to lay aside that pride and arrogance which cleaves so
70 fast to you, and with much humility to give us a candid hearing: and may God convince thee of the truth by means
71 of His word! It was because of the idolators who were settled in the land of promise that He spake thus: "For they
72 worshipped figures made of wood, and gold, and silver, and every beast of the earth and fowl of the air, and they
73 said these are thy gods, and there is no other god beside." Now, it was these Satanic, accursed, and pestilential
74 things made with hands which God forbad that we should worship. But, since there are things made with hands for
75 the glory and service of God—when He would bring in His Own holy people the Hebrews, as He promises to
76 Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob their forefathers, and would give them the land of promise, and would make them
77 possessors and inheritors of the possessions of idolators, and would destroy and utterly wipe out those nations
78 because they had defiled heaven and earth with their wickedness—He spake thus before-hand, in order to secure
79 them from falling into the like superstitions. But He chose of the Israelitish nation two men and blessed them and
80 sanctified them, that they might form all kinds of works made with the hand, which were for the service and glory
81 of God, as a memorial for their generations—these were Bezaleel and Eliab, of the tribe of Dan. Moreover, God
82 said to Moses, "Hew out two tables of stone and bring them to me." And he hewed them and brought them, and
83 God wrote upon them with His Finger the Ten Life-Giving Immortal Commandments. Then said God: "Make
84 Cherubim and Seraphim, and make a table covered with gold within and without; and make an ark of imperishable
85 wood and place the testimonies within the ark as a memorial for your generation—that is, place therein the tables
86 of stone, the golden pot, the rod, the manna." Now, are these things made with the hand, or are they not?—but
87 surely, they were for the glory and service of God. This same Illustrious Moses, constrained by fear, wishing to see
88 His Shape and Likeness lest he should be deceived, entreated God, saying, "Lord, show me Thyself evidently, that I
89 may see Thee." (Ex. 33:18) And God answered: "If thou shouldst see me thou must die; but ascend into the cleft
90 of the rock, and thou shalt see Mine Hinder Parts." Then God showed to him the Mystery that was hidden from
91 ages and from generations. Now, indeed, in our generation, in these last days, He hath manifested His Hinder Parts
92 and His Front Parts together. For when God saw the whole human race in danger of utter destruction, having pity
93 on the work of His Own Hands, He sent His Own Son, Who was Born before all worlds; and He, having Descended
94 from Heaven, entered into the Womb of the Holy Mary the Virgin, causing the True Light to Shine in the Virgin's
95 Womb. And the Light, instead of seed, became Flesh; and He was Baptized in the River Jordan, and He hath
96 Baptized us. And then He began to give us the assurance of distinctive signs that we might not err; for, having
97 entered into Jerusalem, in an Upper Chamber of the Holy and Glorious Zion. He gave to us His Holy Body, and
98 made us to drink His Precious Blood, in the Mystical Supper; then, as it were, He washed our feet, and we eat and
99 rank together with Him, and our hands handled Him, and He made Himself known to us. Thus, the Truth has been
100 manifested to us, and all the error and darkness with which we were involved has been utterly dispersed and hath
101 vanished away; for their voice went out into all the world and their words unto the ends of the earth. For from the
102 whole world men, winged as eagles, went to Jerusalem, as the Lord hath said in the Gospels, "Where the carcass is
103 there shall the eagles be gathered together." (Luk 17:37) Now the carcass means Christ, and pious and Christ-
104 loving men are the eagles which soar aloft. These, having seen the Lord, describing Him as He appeared, drew a
105 picture of Him. And when they had seen James, the Lord's brother, as they saw so they made an image of Him;
106 and, having seen Stephen, the Proto-Martyr, they made an image of Him according to what they beheld; and, in a
107 word, as they saw the persons of those who shed their blood for Christ, they made pictures of them. These, when
108 afterwards men throughout the world had beheld, left the superstitions of the devil, and these they honored, not
109 with the honor of latria, but with relative honor. And now, O Emperor, which appears right to you, that these
110 should be honored or the superstitions of Satan? Moreover, while Christ was Present at Jerusalem, Abgarus, who

111 then swayed the power amongst the Edessenes, having heard of the Miracles of Christ, wrote an Epistle to Christ,
112 and Christ sent a reply to him, written with His Own Hand, and with it the Figure of His holy and Glorious Person.
113 now, send to that image made without hands and see for yourself; for there it is that multitudes of the people of
114 the East assemble themselves together and offer up their prayers; and there are many other such things besides
115 which are made with hands, which the armies of those who love Christ retain and worship, but which you ever day
116 slight and despise. Would you know the reason why we have not described or made an image of the Father of Our
117 Lord Jesus Christ? It is because we know now what He is, and it is impossible to depict or describe the Nature of
118 God; but if we had seen and known Him, as we have seen and known His Son, then we should have painted and
119 described Him also, that you might have called His image also an idol. But we entreat thee, as brethren in Christ, to
120 come to that Truth which thou hast deserted: cast away your arrogance: cease your vain confidence, and write to
121 all and everywhere so that you may restore those whom you have scandalized and whom you have blinded, of
122 whom forsooth you, through your gross insensibility, think nothing at all. The love of Christ knows how, when we
123 enter the Church of the Chief Apostle Peter and look on the picture of the Saint, we are filled with poignant grief,
124 and, as a shower of rain from above, so are our tears poured forth. Christ made the blind to see; but you have
125 blinded those who did see aright, and you have made them to stumble, just as if you thought this to be of no
126 importance: you have made them stupid—you have taken away the right path from them—you have deprived them
127 of prayers; and, instead of vigils and diligent attendance and affection towards God, you have driven your poor
128 people headlong to sloth, drowsiness, and utter carelessness. But you say that we worship stones, and walls, and
129 boards. It is not as you say, O Emperor; but we have these things for our admonition and excitation, and that our
130 dull, untaught, and gross mind may be raised on high by those whose names, who appellation, whose image, we
131 see written thereupon. For we have them not as gods—God forbid!—and our hopes are by no means placed in
132 them. For if the image be of Christ, we say—“O Lord Jesus Christ, help and save us!” But if it be the image of His
133 Holy Mather, we say—“O Holy Mother of God, intercede with thy Son, Our True God, to save our souls.” Or it its e
134 of any particular martyr, as of St. Stephen, we say—“O Holy Stephen, who hast poured forth thy blood for Christ,
135 having boldness, as the Proto-Martyr, intercede for us.” And so, we say of any other martyr who hath borne
136 testimony to Christ. Such are the prayers we offer by them: so, it is not, as you say, that we call on our martyrs as
137 gods. Turn from thine evil imagination, I entreat thee; and free thy soul from the scandals and from the curses
138 which come upon thee from the whole world. Yea, the very children will make sport of thee. Go into any of the
139 elementary schools and say, I am the opponent and destroyer of images, and they will throw their writing tablets
140 at thine head: so that, if thou wilt not be taught by the wise, thou shalt by the foolish. But thou hast written that,
141 “as Uzziah King of the Jews, after eight hundred years, brought the brazen serpent out of the temple, so I, after
142 eight hundred years, have taken images out of the churches.” Verily, Uzziah was brother to thee, and exhibited the
143 same audacity and tyrannized over the priests just as you do now; for that serpent the Holy David brought into the
144 temple together with the Holy Ark. And what was it except brass hallowed by God for the sake of those who were
145 bitten and hurt by serpents? And it was placed there that it might be shown how that same which injected evil into
146 the first creation formed by God—namely, Adam and Eve—the same should be for the healing of sinners. But as,
147 forsooth, you boast that after eight hundred years you cast the holiness and the blessing of martyrs out of the
148 churches, know that as at first you confessed rightly enough of your own good will, not by any compulsion, and as
149 now you have with your own hand written as above, that you have brought their curse upon your own head. We,
150 indeed, were minded, as we had right and authority from St. Peter the Chief of the Apostles, to inflict condign
151 punishment upon you; but as you have brought the punishment upon yourself, there let it abide and rest upon
152 you, together with the counsellors whom you have in your confidence. To what extent have you not injured the
153 edification and marred the course of those who ran well, the love of Christ knows. When we have entered any
154 church, we have seen the histories of the miraculous conversation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, or of His Holy Mother
155 holding in her arms and suckling the Lord Our God, and the Angels standing all around, and singing the Trisagion,
156 we never leave without serious compunction. And who can but feel compunction, or refrain from tears, as he looks
157 on the Sacred Bath—the priests standing around—the Mystical Supper—the giving of sight to the blind—the
158 resurrection of Lazarus—the healing of the leper or the paralytic—the sitting down on the ground—the baskets—the
159 fragments—the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor—the Crucifixion of Our Lord—His Burial—His Resurrection—His Holy
160 Ascension—the Descent of the Holy Ghost? Who that contemplates the history of Abraham, laying his sword on the
161 neck of his son, is not filled with remorse and melted into tears? And so, with respect to any of the conflicts of the
162 Lord. But now, O Emperor, of the two it were better for thee to be called a heretic than the persecutor and
163 destroyer of the histories, pictures, and images of Our Lord’s Passion. Not but that it is, indeed, a thing bad
164 enough, and by all means to be avoided, to be called ‘heretic’ at all; but in what way this is better than the other I
165 will now unfold. The heretic is so declared to be, even though he is known to be such, not in many points, but in

166 few. Now, scandals are hard to avoid, and theological Truths are oftentimes very involved and very difficult to
167 determine they, therefore, who discuss these matters without sufficient humility, from the ignorance and darkness
168 under which they labor, fall forthwith into error. Surely their condemnation will not be so great as thine; for thou
169 hast manifestly set thyself against things conspicuous enough and clear as the light, in that thou hast stripped the
170 Churches of God, which our holy fathers clothed and adorned; and this when you had such a Pontiff as my Lord
171 Germanus, my brother, and fellow-minister, whom you should have consulted as a father and a teacher as being
172 now in years, and having no small experience in ecclesiastical matters. This day that holy man hath reached his
173 ninety-fifth year, continually occupied in the service of Church and King; and constantly, in both these respects, he
174 has been found abundantly useful. Alas! that you should have dismissed such a one from your counsels, and
175 should have listened to that lawless fool, Ephesus the son of Apsimar. Now, it was my Lord Germanus, and the
176 then Patriarch my Lord George, who advised and persuaded Constantine, the son of Constans, the father of
177 Justinian [II Rhinotemetus], to correspond with us (our predecessors) at Rome. And he wrote on oath entreating
178 that we should send men of worth, that so an Ecumenical Council might be assembled together; and he
179 declared:—"I will not preside therein as Sovereign or speak at all authoritatively, but only as one of the Council:
180 and as the chief Priests shall agree so will I agree, and those who speak aright we will receive, and those who speak
181 amiss we will expel and send into exile. And, if mine own father hath perverted in the least our Holy and
182 Immaculate Faith, I first of all am ready to anathematize him." By God's Grace we seen, and the Sixth Synod was
183 celebrated in peace. You should know, O King, that the doctrines of the Holy Church belong not to Kings but to the
184 Priests. For this purpose, have Priests been set over the Church and severed from all secular affairs; and Kings, in
185 like manner, are severed from ecclesiastical affairs, and should be solely employed in their own peculiar
186 occupation: and the Council of Christian Kings and Pious Priests becomes one power so long as their affairs are
187 pursued in peace and love. But thou hast written to us that we should assemble an Ecumenical Synod. To us such
188 an assemblage appears quite superfluous. Thou alone art the opponent of images, their reviler, and subverter.
189 Give up that point and grant us but the favor of thy silence and all scandal will cease—the world will be at peace. Be
190 it so that we should give ear to thee, and Priests from all parts of the world be got together and the Assembly and
191 Council commence its Session—where is the Christ-loving and pious Sovereign who, according to custom, ought to
192 sit in such a Council to honor those who speak well, to expel those who turn aside from the truth, since thou, O
193 Emperor, art so vacillating and barbarous? Know you not that the attempt in which you are engaged against holy
194 images is one of turbulence, insolence, and pride? Cease and be quite, and there will be no need of a Council.
195 Write only to all whom you have scandalized everywhere throughout the world, [i.e. that is those to whom was
196 falsely written] that Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Gregory, Pope of Rome, have erred in the matter
197 of images, and we will set you quite free from all guilt of error on your part as having received power from God to
198 loose the things that are in heaven or on earth! God is Witness that to whatever letters you were pleased to send
199 to the Sovereigns of the West we added our suffrage, endeavoring to conciliate them to you, praising and
200 magnifying your goodness, so long as we saw you continuing to walk according to your former course. So, they
201 received your Laureate in such a manner as it was fit one king should honor another; and this they did so long as
202 they had not heard of your attack upon images. But after they had learned and were assured that thou didst send
203 Jubinus Spatharocandidatus to Chalcpatria to destroy and break in pieces the image of the Savior, styled
204 "Antiphoneta," where so many miracles had been wrought, and that many women were found there full of zeal
205 who had of old brought odours, who entreated this Spatharocandidatus, saying, "O do not such outrage!"—but as
206 he would not listen to their petition, but did actually ascend the latter and thrice smote with an axe the face of the
207 Saviour's image—these women, no longer bearing such wickedness, did draw away the ladder, and, having beaten
208 him with their fists, did there make an end of him; and that on this occasion you, emulous of evil, slew of these
209 women I know not how many, and this in the presence of worthy men from Rome, from France, from the Vandals,
210 from Mauritania, from Gotthia, and, in a word, from all the Western interior: then, as these returned each to his
211 own country, and there related thy later and childish proceedings, then they cast down and trampled upon thy
212 Laureata and overthrew thy statues. And the Lombards and Sarmatians and other northern tribes, having declared
213 war, overran the unfortunate Decapolis, and took its metropolis, Ravenna; and they have driven out thy rulers and
214 set up their own, and they would gladly do the same to the province near us and to Rome itself—and all this while
215 you can do nothing to help thyself—these are the fruits of thy folly and obstinacy! But you think to terrify us and
216 add—"I will send to Rome and break down the image of St. Peter. I will bind and carry away Gregory the High
217 Priest there, as Constans carried away Martin." Now, you should reflect that High Priests who preside in Rome sit
218 there for the purpose of effecting peace between the East and the West, and are, as it were, a middle and party
219 wall between them, and thy predecessors were the most anxious to keep and preserve this bond of peace; but if
220 you act insolently, and send out your threats we shall not think necessary to contend with you: the High Priests of

221 Rome will depart forty-and-twenty stadia into the country of Campania; and then you may come and pursue the
222 winds. (Eccl. 34:2) Our predecessor, Martin, was earnest in his days exhorting to peace; wherefore Constans, who
223 thought amiss concerning the Holy Trinity, and consented with certain heretical High Priests—namely, Sergius, Paul,
224 and Pyrrhus—having sent and seized him in a tyrannical way, carried him off to Byzantium, and, having afflicted him
225 in various ways, sent him into banishment; and, moreover, he greatly tried the Monk Maximus and his disciple
226 Anastasius, and at length finished with sending them also into banishment to Lazica. Constans, who banished thee,
227 did not escape vengeance, but perished in his sin; for Nezeuxius, Count of the Bedchamber, being certified by the
228 Bishops of Sicily that his master was an heretic, slew him in the temple and he died in his sin. But of the
229 blessedness of Martin, the very city of Cherson, whither he was banished, and of the Bosphorus, give fullest
230 testimony, and also the North and its inhabitants, who are accustomed to attend his tomb and there receive cures
231 of various disease. As far as we are concerned, we could be well content that the Lord would grant us to go the
232 same way that Holy Martin went before us; but, for the benefit of the many, we would yet longer wish to live: for
233 the whole West looks towards our humility; and though we (may seem to) be nothing, yet in us they have the
234 greatest confidence, and in him—namely, St. Peter, whose image you threatened to break down and destroy—for
235 him all the Princes of the West look upon as an earthly deity. So, should you venture on any such rash undertaking,
236 the Princes of the West would avenge the cause of those of the East whom thou hast injured: but we entreat you
237 by the Lord turn from these new and childish proceedings. You know well that you are unable to defend your
238 Roman province, except it be the city only, on account of its contiguity to the sea; and as we have said before, if
239 the Pope chose but to move four-and-twenty stadia from Rome, he need have no further dread of thee. One thing
240 troubles us—the wild and barbarous nations are becoming civilized; but you are, from civilized, becoming wild and
241 barbarous. All the West offer the first-fruits of their Faith to Peter, head and chief of the Apostles, should you send
242 any here for the destruction of St. Peter’s image—see—we warn you beforehand; we are free from the blood which
243 may be shed on the occasion. On thine own head and on thine own neck be all these things. We have lately
244 received an earnest invitation from the remotest West—from a country called Septetus—desiring that, by the Grace
245 of God, we should visit them and bestow upon them holy baptism; and, that none may accuse us of idleness or
246 sloth, we intent to begird ourselves for the journey. May God put His fear in thine heart, and may God convert
247 thee to the Truth and free thee from those errors which thou hast mischievously foisted on the world, and speedily
248 may I receive a letter from thee announcing thy conversion; and may He Who Descended from Heaven and
249 entered the Virgin’s Womb for our salvation dwell in thine heart, and speedily expel those that inhabit there and
250 cause all these scandals, and so grant peace to the Churches of all Christians for ever and ever. Amen.

251 **Second Letter of Pope St. Gregory II to the Emperor Leo on the Veneration of Icons**

252 The letters of your God-defended Sovereignty and brotherhood in Christ we have received from your ambassador
253 Rufinus; and really it almost wearies us to death to see you thus impenitent and obstinately persisting in your
254 former sinfulness, and that you savour not of things that be of Christ, nor care to be a follower and imitator of our
255 holy, glorious, and wonder-working fathers and doctors. But not to speak of any foreign teachers, but only of those
256 of your city and country, are they wiser than Gregory Thaumaturgus, and Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Divine
257 [i.e., “The Theologian”], Basil of Cappadocia, or John Chrysostom?—not to mention the myriads and myriads of our
258 holy and inspired fathers like to them? But you follow mainly your own will and the passions which dwell within
259 you, and you have written, “I am King and Priest.” Such, verily, thy predecessors proved themselves to be in word
260 and deed, who founded churches and took care of them, and, together with the Priests, with zeal and earnestness
261 sought out the truth of Orthodoxy—such as were Constantine the Great, Theodosius the Great, Valentinian the
262 Great, and Constantine, the father of Justinian [the Second], who was present at the Sixth General Council. These
263 Sovereigns reigned in a manner pleasing to God; and being one with the High Priests, in mind and council, they
264 assembled Synods, searching out the truth of the opinions laid down; and, moreover, they built and adorned
265 churches. These, indeed, were Kings and Priests who proved that such they were by their works. But thou, from
266 what time thou hast received thy dominion, hast not to the end observed the definitions of the fathers; but
267 whereas thou hast found our churches clothed, adorned, and beautified with golden vests and fringes, thou hast
268 disrobed them and made them bare. Now, what are our churches—are they not made with hands—are they not a
269 compound of stone, wood, straw, mud, and lime? But these are made ornamental with images and pictures of the
270 miracles of the Saints, and of the Passion of Our Lord, and of His Holy Glorious Mother, and of the Holy Apostles. Is
271 it not on pictures and images men delight to spend their money? And do not men and women, holding in their
272 arms their newly-baptized infants, point out to them their histories with the finger, as is also done to youths and to
273 those who are converted from the Gentiles? And thus, they edify their minds and lift up their hearts to God; but
274 you, having caused such things to cease amongst your humble people, have filled their place with gossiping’s, and
275 babblings, and harpings, and prating’s, and pipings, and all kinds of trifling. From giving of thanks and giving of

276 praise you have brought them to vain and foolish fables. Take up your portion amongst such fools and praters if
277 you will. Yet hear our humility and cease, and obey the Holy Church, even as you have found and received.
278 Doctrines belong not to kinds, but the Chief Priests, for we have the mind of Christ. The mind fitted to regulate
279 ecclesiastical affairs is very different from that which disposes matters in the provinces of kingdoms. Be assured
280 that a mind so fierce and foolish, and, withal, so dull in spiritual things, as is your own, can never be sufficient to
281 regulate ecclesiastical doctrines. I will now lay before you the difference between the Palace and the Church, the
282 King and the High Priest. Acquiesce and be saved and be no more contentious. If any man should strip you of your
283 royal robes, your diadem, your purple, your vest, and take away all your attendants, would you not forthwith be
284 looked upon as mean, vile, and worthless? And to this state have you reduced churches: you have taken from
285 them what you never had yourself—the robe of holiness—and hast made them vile. As then, no Priest, however
286 exalted, hath any right of inspect the King’s palace or ordering his royal household, equally no Sovereign hath any
287 right of overlooking the Church, either in the election of the clergy or in consecrating or handling the symbols of
288 Sacred Mysteries, or, indeed, of partaking at all of them independent of the Priest. Now, let each remain in the
289 calling to which he hath been called by God. See you not, O King, the difference between Kings and Priests? If
290 anyone offend against thee, O King, you confiscate his goods and reduce him to poverty and do but leave him his
291 life; or you hang, behead, or banish him, and put him far beyond the reach of his children or other beloved
292 relations and friends. Not so act the Priests: when one offends against them and confesses his fault, instead of
293 hanging and beheading, they put the yoke of the Gospel on his neck—they imprison him in their Church
294 treasures—they banish him to the service of the Church—bind him among the Catechumens—make his bowels
295 serve with fasting, his eyes with vigils, his mouth with singing lauds; and, in order to chasten him the more and
296 the better to starve the carnal man, they bring before him the Venerable Body of the Lord and make him to drink His
297 Holy Blood; and thus, having restored him as a vessel of election and without blame, they send him pure and
298 spotless to the Lord. See you now no difference between the Royal and the Priestly office? Sovereigns who have
299 lived piously and in Christ never disobeyed or persecuted the Priest. Thou, O King, hast transgressed and acted
300 perversely; and whereas thou didst write with thine own hand in all due submission, and hast professed that he
301 who breaks down the boundaries set up by the fathers is accursed, thou art self-condemned and has caused the
302 Holy Ghost to depart from thee. You would fain avenge yourself and tyrannize over us with an armed and carnal
303 hand; but we, unharmed and defenseless, have no earthly carnal defense, call upon the Great Commander of all
304 creation, even Christ, Who Sitteth in the heavens above all armies, above all rule, that He would send the devil into
305 thee (as saith the Apostle) “to deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the soul may be
306 preserved.” See, O King, to what a pitch of shamelessness and inhumanity you have arrived: thou hast dashed thy
307 soul headlong amidst the deeps and precipices, because thou canst not humble thyself or incline thy stiffened
308 neck. For when at the Last Great Day, when all our secret things shall be made manifest, other Priests will gain
309 great praise and glory for that then they shall be able to present their rulers to God blameless and pure from all
310 faults and shameful falls by means of their faithful teaching and sound doctrine, then shall we e shamed before the
311 Holy Angels, and we shall stand deeply awed, because that, through thy perversity, we never could make any gain
312 of thee. The High Priests, our predecessors, will present the Sovereigns of their several periods before God greatly
313 to the shame of our humility; since we shall not be able to present the Sovereigns of our times honorable or
314 glorious, but inglorious and reprobate. Wherefore, we entreat you, repent, and return and come back to the truth.
315 And as you have found and have received, so persevere, venerate, and honor the glorious fathers and doctors
316 who, under God, have removed the blindness of our heart and eyes and have made us to see clearly.
317 But thou hast written—“How is that in the Six General Councils no mention was ever made of images?” Very true,
318 O King; but neither has anything been said concerning bread and water, whether we should or should not eat. For
319 us these things were ages ago handed down to us as means of preserving life, so have images been handed down
320 to us, and the High Priests have ever been accustomed to take them with them to the Councils. No one who loved
321 Christ or who loved God, when about to travel, would ever think of going on his way without images, since they
322 are honorable and approved by God. Well then, if you will, be both King and Priest, as you have written before us;
323 but if you are ashamed of this, as a Sovereign, to give ground of accusations against yourself, at least write to all
324 whom you have scandalized, that Gregory Pope of Rome hath erred concerning images, and also Germanus
325 Patriarch of Constantinople—we will take on ourselves the guilt and sin, as having received power from above to
326 loose and to bind things in heaven and things on the earth, and you need have no fear on this point. We gave you
327 this challenge before and you were not ready for it—neither now are you read. We, indeed, as those that must give
328 account to their Lord, have delivered to you instructions and doctrine even as we have received of the Lord; but you have
329 turned a deaf ear to our humility, and to Germanus the President, and all our holy, wonder-working, and glorious teachers and
330 fathers: and thou hast followed depraved and unsound teachers, who have erred concerning the truth. Well!—have your
331 portion with such. But we, as we told you before, are, by the Grace of God, about entering on a journey to the interior of the

332 West on behalf of those who there are seeking Baptism. For though I sent them Bishops and Clerks of our Holy Church, their
333 Princes are not inclined to submit to be baptized by them, desiring that I myself should undertake the work. Wherefore, by the
334 Grace of God, we are getting ourselves ready for the journey, that we may incur no censure of apathy and carelessness. May
335 God give thee understanding and repentance to turn to the truth which thou hast forsaken, and may He again bring back His
336 poor people to Christ the One Shepherd, and to the one sheepfold of Orthodox Churches and Priests. And may the Lord Our
337 god give peace to all the world, now and for ever and ever. Amen.
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