

ICONS FOR EVANGELICALS: THE THEOLOGY AND USE OF ICONS IN
ORTHODOX CHURCHES AND POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS FOR THE
USE OF SYMBOL IN CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

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Summary:

This paper surveys various ideas around the use of icons in worship. Included is a discussion around the historical Orthodox theology of icon and a related critique. Practical suggestions are given regarding the possibility of inclusion of icon in contemporary evangelical worship contexts. Included is a glossary of related terms.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	2
A Brief Overview Of The Use Of Icon In The Orthodox Church	4
The Understanding of Tradition in the Orthodox Church	4
Origins of the Use of Icons	5
The Development Of The Theology of Icons	7
The Edict of Milan	8
Image as Equal to Word	9
The Kenosis of God	10
Icons Represent the “Person” Of The Subject	11
Latreia vs Proskinesis	13
Iconoclastic Controversies and The Defense of Icons	15
The Seventh Ecumenical Council	18
Themes and Examples of Icons	23
Some Physical Features of Icons	25
Transcendence In Icons	28
Some Examples of Icons	29
The Iconostasis	33
Practical Uses of Icons	35
A Brief Critique of The Orthodox Theology of Icons	37
The Implications of A Theology of Equality Between Image And Word	37
Contradictions in the Theology of Icons	38
Orthodoxy And The Other Arts	39
The Dangers of Veneration as Idolatry	40
Problems In The Idea of Beauty	41
Eliminating the Personality of the Icon Painter	42
Problems Related to the Iconostasis	42
Symbol In Contemporary Evangelical Churches	44
Differences Between Western and Eastern Theological Perspectives	44
Anti-image Sentiment in the Post Reformation Church	47
A Healthy Understanding of Symbol	48
The Possibility of Veneration In The Evangelical Church	51
The Proper Introduction of Icon	55
Practical Applications For The Use Of Symbol In Evangelical Churches	57
Teaching on Images	57
Images on PowerPoint	59
Icons for the Home	59
Seriousness of The Arts As They Relate To Faith	60
Conclusion	62
Glossary	63
Bibliography	65

*“The Theology and Use Of Icons In Orthodox Churches and Potential Applications
For The Use Of Symbol In Contemporary Evangelical Churches”*

Introduction

This project begins with a brief overview of the theology and use of icon in the Orthodox Church. Aspects of the icon that will be considered include: the understanding of Tradition in the Orthodox Church; origins of the use of icons; the development of the theology of icons; the iconoclastic controversies and the defense of icons; an understanding of veneration; image as authoritatively equal to Word; and some themes, examples and practical use of icons. Following this overview will be a brief critique of Orthodox doctrine and use of the icon. This critique will be primarily helpful toward the third section of the project, which will be to draw potential applications for the use of symbol in the evangelical church today. In fact, the evangelical church already uses symbol, but often without a great deal of thought. This study is significant in that the thoughtful use of symbol, and potentially, some kind of use of icon, is essential for effective ministry during the postmodern era. This project will seek to develop a healthy theology of the use of image in worship that can be applied to an evangelical context.

The final section of this project will be a compilation of the previous study into a presentation suitable for the seminary classroom. It is intended that this material will become part of a course in worship and the arts. This material will relate specifically to the historical use of symbol in the Orthodox Church and potential applications for today’s evangelical church leaders.

Through the process of this work, there has been fairly close consultation with a number of people. This contact has been for the purpose of evaluation of both the content and the possibilities of presentation in a classroom context. The individuals consulted are listed in the bibliography of this paper. Their input is reflected often in the project, however, in light of the informal nature of many of the discussions, much of their input has settled to the subconscious level and is not referenced. It would be ideal to have students evaluate this material after this course was actually taught, but this will not happen during the time allotted for the project.

A Brief Overview Of The Use Of Icon In The Orthodox Church

The Understanding of Tradition in the Orthodox Church

In the Orthodox Church, tradition is highly valued as the work of God over long periods of time to guide and direct the church. In this sense, tradition is the continuity of the experience of the community and the leading of the Holy Spirit in that continuity. Ouspensky suggests that: "Tradition is the power of the historical community to understand and know the truth. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in time."¹ In Orthodox tradition, this experience is intrinsically woven with the content of the Scriptures and the painting or writing of icons. This sense of community is profoundly different from western individualism. In the west, Tradition used to mean a rich heritage of community practice. Now, however, it often means simply an old way of doing things. In fact, our understanding of the idea of tradition has lost much of its identity. "Tradition is one of those terms which, through being too rich in meanings, runs the risk of finally having none."²

Tradition, in the Orthodox Church, in many senses has equal authority to the scripture. This understanding is important in an overview of the use of Icon. Icon painters were required to adhere to tradition, both of icon painting itself as well as of the church in general.³ This is consistent with the idea that Scripture itself was written according to Tradition. There are many references in Scripture to things that were passed on verbally but not written down. (II Thess 2:15 – things passed on by

¹ Leonid Ouspensky. *Theology of the Icon: Volumes 1 & 2*. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), p. 136.

² Leonid Ouspensky & Vladimir Lossky. *The Meaning of Icons*. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), p. 11.

³ Ouspensky, p. 296

mouth and letter, I Cor 11:2 – urged to maintain traditions passed on to them).⁴ This understanding of the idea of tradition permeates the content and technique of the making of icons as well as the ways they are to be treated. In the Orthodox Church, remaining the same is valued over change. While there has been change during the 2000 years of the church, it has come over long periods of time and has been validated widely by consensus of church leadership and adherence to the content of previously established tradition.

Origins of the Use of Icons

Most scholars admit that the concept of the icon pre-dates Christianity and probably originated with an ancient Egyptian funeral portrait.⁵ This is an example of the relatively common occurrence of the church borrowing from culture.

“To develop its language, the Church used, as we have seen, form, symbols and even myths of antiquity, i.e., pagan forms of expression. But it did not use these forms without purifying them and adapting them to its own goals. Christianity absorbs everything that can serve as a form of expression from the world around it.”⁶

The first evidence of Christian art is found in the Catacombs. During the times of persecution, various symbols such as fish and loaves were painted on the walls of these secret places.⁷ These were places where early Christians gathered and where the church leaders (clergy) were buried.⁸ The primary purpose of these pictures was to convey the stories of the gospels and to portray their inner meaning.⁹

⁴ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 137

⁵ Mahmoud Zibawi. *The Icon: Its Meaning and History*. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 79

⁶ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 86.

⁷ Zibawi, 1993, p. 79.

⁸ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 38.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 27.

While the origins of Christian art may be traced, in a general way, to the pictures of the Catacombs, principles of Icon painting are not seen here.

The first instance of a Christian icon is traced to the story of the image created by Christ Himself. The story is told of an ancient King Abgar of Osroene, who was dying of leprosy and sent a message begging Jesus to visit him. According to the story, Christ created an image of himself by pressing his face on a cloth. Apparently, this image remained in Edessa until the tenth century, when it was taken to Constantinople. After the destruction of the city in 1204CE, it disappeared.¹⁰ This is called the image “made without human hands” or the “holy face” or the Acheiropoietos.¹¹ While there is virtually no physical evidence to support this event, it is considered a reliable story of the origin of the icon of Christ.

In the History of the Church by Eusebius, the author says that he has seen many portraits of the Savior, Peter and Paul. This indicates that images of the Lord were present during the first centuries of the church.¹² This is somewhat significant in that, by many accounts, Eusebius was antagonistic to icons. For example, there is a record of a request of Eusebius for an icon. This came from Constantia, sister of Constantine the great. His decidedly negative response was surprise. He claimed he did not understand what she could possibly have meant.¹³ Many iconoclasts appeal to Eusebius’s response as evidence against the use of icons. In

¹⁰ Jeremy Begbey, Ed. *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through The Arts*. [Jim Forest. *Through Icons: Word And Image Together*] (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p. 84.

¹¹ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 51.

¹² Ouspensky and Lossky, 1983, p. 25.

¹³ This discussion is preserved in “...a fragment from the Testament of Epiphanius of Cyprus.” Ambrosios Giakalis. *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council*. (New York, NY: E. J. Brill, 1994), p. 25. also Georges Florovsky, *Christianity And Culture*. (Belmont, MA: Nordland Pub. Co., 1974), p. 108.

any case; “By the time of Justinian it was accepted that iconography was to be used as a servant of the Christian faith.”¹⁴

Another legendary origin of the icon is the account of St. Luke painting icons of Mary and the Christ child.¹⁵ Orthodox tradition holds that Luke painted three of these icons.¹⁶ Again, we have no evidence of such occurrences. There is very little evidence that paintings or icons were used in the church prior to 250CE.¹⁷

The Development Of The Theology of Icons

It may be fair to say that the theology of the icon developed more in the context of reaction than independent of other circumstances. This may be said of much of the theology of the church. In other words, concise theology regarding practices appeared only when these practices were questioned. This seems to be true of the theology of the icon. Much of the doctrinal clarity regarding icons came out of the response to various iconoclasm designed to repudiate and remove icons from the church. This will be discussed in more detail in a later section, but it is important to point out that the use of icon was a natural development of the church in a primarily illiterate culture. Pictures and oral presentation of the gospel were normative. These were not primarily theological things but outworkings of faith. As the use of icon and images came into question, concise theological defenses were developed.

¹⁴ John Baggley. *Doors of Perception: Icons And Their Spiritual Significance*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), p. 17.

¹⁵ Zibawi, 1993, p. 29.

¹⁶ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 60.

¹⁷ Baggley, 1988, p. 8.

The “art” of the icon was (and remains) distinct from the art of the world. It “...does not resemble the art of the world. It expresses different kinds of truths and has other goals. If it mingles with secular art, it no longer corresponds to the goal which it must serve.”¹⁸ Rather, the icon serves as “...a link between the eternal and the temporal, serving as an image of the divine world even to the extent that it partakes in the spiritual energy of what it portrays, thereby aiding the worshiper as a bridge or signpost for his own pilgrimage through this earthly life.”¹⁹ It functions as a channel of grace rather than mere decorative artwork. In this way: “The beauty of the church is different from the beauty of the world because it reflects the harmony of the age to come.”²⁰ “An icon is thus the servant of the Holy Tradition of the Church, a servant of the Gospel, not a mere artistic device.”²¹

The Edict of Milan

The Edict of Milan (313CE) had a profound impact on virtually every aspect of the Christian church. After this edict, Byzantine art emerged as the first Christian style. Its purpose was didactic, to teach the people through pictures. Pope Gregory the Great is credited with saying: “Painting can do for the illiterate what writing does for those who can read”.²² This edict also had an impact on the icon. Prior to Constantine, the art of the church was hidden. After 313CE, it was possible that the art of the church could become public. Prior to Constantine, religious art was

¹⁸ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 30.

¹⁹ Carnegie S. Calian. *Icon And Pulpit: The Protestant-Orthodox Encounter*. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 129.

²⁰ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 31.

²¹ Baggley, 1988, p. 7.

²² E. H. Gombrich. *The Story of Art*. (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), p. 135.

meaningful to those who understood the faith but not to the new convert. After Constantine, there were many converts. The art of the church had to change to be more accessible to the new, unknowledgeable believers.²³ The role of image in both communication of truth and in expression of worship became increasingly significant. Many of the theologians of the time concluded that painted images had even greater power than words.²⁴ As a result, the use of image in the church was encouraged and flourished.

Image as Equal to Word

The Orthodox understanding of icon confers a basic authoritative equality of image and word. “The word is an image, therefore the image is the word. Images are on the same level as the word.”²⁵ Zibawi suggests that “...the icon is the expression of the good news, on a par with the written Gospels.”²⁶ The technical aspects of the icon were under the control of the iconographer but not the content. This reemphasizes the idea that content is the Gospel. Structure and style, which are at the discretion of men, are technical.

“In the eyes of the Church, therefore, the icon is not art illustrating Holy Scripture; it is a language that corresponds to it and is equivalent to it, corresponding not to the letter of Scripture or the book itself as an object, but the evangelical kerygma, that is, to the content of the Scripture itself...”²⁷

²³ (Ouspensky/ Lossky, 1983, p. 29)

²⁴ for example, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Cyril of Alexandria (Ouspensky, 1992, p. 81ff)

²⁵ (Ouspensky/ Lossky, 1983, p. 30)

²⁶ (Zibawi, 1993, p. 11)

²⁷ (Ouspensky, 1992, p. 139)

This creates the possibility of the role of icons as preacher. In fact, Limouris suggests that icons play a role as important as the preaching of the word.²⁸ They allow humans to partake in the divine reality of God. They function as windows to the eternal. This is consistent with the Orthodox understanding that the bible is a verbal icon of Christ and should be venerated in the same way.²⁹

The Kenosis of God

The basic idea of the kenosis of God is that God participated in the created world through Christ so that human beings have the potential to participate in the divine. A scriptural example of this is found in II Peter 1:4. Essentially, “God became man so that man might become God.”; “The Word became flesh so that the flesh could become word”³⁰ The Orthodox discuss this in relationship to Philippians 2 as the emptying of God. Man is to become like God and participate the nature of God. This is “...a dynamic task to accomplish.”³¹ Essentially, man, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, “...becomes God by grace”.³² While this sounds suspect to an evangelical in that it appears that the doctrine implies that men may become gods, this is not precisely the case. Rather, men may participate in the nature of God. While biblical evidence for this is not overwhelming, it is present. In essence, it reflects the desire of man to be like Christ. This is a possible thing. It is significant in light of the veneration of icons. It is not really the picture that is venerated, but the “God likeness” of the person represented in the picture. While this appears to be the

²⁸ (Limouris, 1990, p. ix)

²⁹ Timothy Ware. *The Orthodox Church*. (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 209.

³⁰ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 152.

³¹ Ibid, p. 156.

³² Ibid, p. 158.

eneration, or even worship of an image, it is actually understood as the veneration of God (in man) *through* the image.

In the context of the kenosis of God, the Orthodox understand all of creation in a very sacramental way. All of matter was sanctified through the incarnation of Christ. The crucial argument is that when God became matter in Christ, "...an eternal change took place in the relationship between God and material creation."³³

"Our brothers of the East consider the concrete things that are all around us much less in themselves and for themselves, according to the value of their own components, than as a reflection or image of a transcendent reality which they exist to express."³⁴

While this allows the possibility of an increased sense of the holistic, it also reflects a desire for the elimination of the sensual. "The icon therefore shows Christian life aiming at absolute inward peace and freedom from all passion and emotion."³⁵ This does appear to be in some contradiction with the teaching of John of Damascus that "...matter is the creation of God and a good thing."³⁶

Icons Represent the "Person" Of The Subject

In western art, images are generally representative of the nature of the subject. In other words, a painting illuminates certain physical features of a subject that allow a viewer to make certain, primarily subjective judgments about that subject. This is because most art focuses on the physical or the *nature* of the subject. Art that focuses on the nature of the subject only has the options of

³³ St. John of Damascus. *On The Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack Divine Images*. Trans. By David Anderson. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), p. 8.

³⁴ M. J. Le Guillou, O.P., Trans. By Donald Attwater, *The Spirit of Eastern Orthodoxy*. (New York, NY: Hawthorn Books, 1965), p. 53.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 55)

³⁶ St. John of Damascus, 1980, p. 62.

humanity or divinity. An Orthodox understanding of icon is significantly different from either of these perspectives. According to Ouspensky, it is very dangerous to try to represent either of these in art.³⁷ Rather, the icon portrays the *person* of the subject.³⁸ The icon is linked to the prototype not because it attempts to be an identical representation of the prototype. “The icon is joined to its prototype because it portrays the person and carries his name. This is precisely what makes communion with the represented person possible, what makes him known.”³⁹ When one renders honor to the image, one is rendering honor to the prototype. Because of this, exact physical representation of the subject is not crucial. So the icon is not essentially an image, but an anti-image. In a sense, for example, this is the opposite of the shroud of Turin, which is said to be an exact replica. “Because it (the icon) is less than an image, it is infinitely more.”⁴⁰ Icons of Christ portray the person of Christ, not just the physical image which might result in either the lessening of his humanity or divinity. This does seem in sharp contrast to the Orthodox understanding of the origination of the icon by Christ himself through the Acheiropoietos, which is more like the shroud of Turin. While it is possible that the image made without hands was not a precise physical replication, it remains somewhat inconsistent.

³⁷ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 125.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 125)

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 127)

⁴⁰ Gennadios Limouris, [Blancy]. *Icons, Windows on Eternity: Theology and Spirituality in Colour*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), p. 41)

Latreia vs Proskynesis

There is a significant distinction, in Orthodox theology, between the act of veneration (proskynesis) and worship (latreia). Alan Blancy suggests that there was a fatal translation error between the Greek and the Latin in the translating of the Greek word proskynesis as adoratio (adoration).⁴¹ This caused many of the problems with the idea of veneration. Adoration is reserved for God alone yet proskynesis is a commonly used word to describe acts between people. This resulted in a misunderstanding of the idea of veneration. Of course, through the history of the icon, there was widespread abuse and actual inappropriate worship.⁴²

St. John of Damascus distinguishes between veneration and adoration using the terms absolute worship (adoration) and relative worship (veneration).⁴³ He identifies five kinds of absolute worship:⁴⁴

1. Adoration – we give this to God alone
 - a. All will eventually worship, willingly or unwillingly (Phil 2)
2. The awe and yearning we have for God
 - a. He is perfect and good
 - b. He is admired, worshipped, glorified and desired
3. Thanksgiving for all good things
4. Beseeching God to listen to our needs and desires
5. Repentance and confession

In addition, he identifies seven kinds of relative worship.⁴⁵ This kind of worship may be offered to created things.

1. Places where God has rested – Holy Places
 - a. Includes people – Theotokos and the Saints
 - b. God dwells in them

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 35.

⁴² Ibid, p. 35.

⁴³ St. John of Damascus, 1980, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 82-84.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 84-88.

- c. "...they are truly gods, not by nature but because they partake of the divine nature..."
- 2. Places where God has accomplished our salvation
 - a. Mt. Sinai, Nazareth, the cave and manger of Bethlehem, ...
- 3. Objects dedicated to God
 - a. E.g. the holy Gospel and other books
 - b. Patens, chalices, censers, candlesticks, altars
 - c. Dan 5:2 – Belshazzar made people serve wine in sacred vessels and God brought his kingdom to an end – signifying the sacredness of stuff
- 4. Images that were seen by prophets
 - a. Aaron's rod (prefigured the mystery of the virgin)
 - b. The cross
- 5. Each other
 - a. We are God's inheritance and were made according to His image
- 6. Those who have been given authority to rule over us
 - a. Pharaoh - Gen 50:18 – Joseph and his brothers prostrated themselves (Proskynesis) before Pharaoh
- 7. Masters by their servants

Conairis agrees with this distinction between veneration and worship. He suggests that:

"The icon becomes a meeting place, an existential encounter, a window through which we look on the Saints not as shadowy figures from a remote past but as contemporary brothers and sisters in Christ, members of the same household of God. We feel free to call on them through prayer for family support as they intercede to God in our behalf."⁴⁶

Chrysostomos of Myra teaches that "veneration of honour" which is rendered to the persons of the saints through their icons, is appropriate.⁴⁷ Ouspensky agrees in that while icons must be the object of veneration, it is inappropriate to give them adoration, which only belongs to God.⁴⁸ It remains difficult, however, to identify the difference.

⁴⁶ Anthony M. Coniaris. *Introducing the Orthodox Church: Its Faith and Life*. (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Pub., 1982), p. 101.

⁴⁷ Gennadios Limouris, [Chrysostomos of Myra]. *Icons, Windows on Eternity: Theology and Spirituality in Colour*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), p. 2.

⁴⁸ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 138.

When the icon is properly venerated, it becomes a door to the holy. In this sense, it is holy itself.

“Holiness, as the Orthodox understand it, is not a static and incommunicable state. Quite the contrary, uncreated energy suffuses and penetrates every created “environment”, transforming visible reality, for the sake of believers, when that reality does not voluntarily oppose the will of God.”⁴⁹

This seems similar to the experience of marriage. When a spouse is absent, one may find memory and even some degree of presence in objects that bring reminders of that person (for example, smell on a pillow). It is not the object that is being enjoyed but the spouse through the object. Veneration is similar to this. It becomes a problem when the object is substituted for the original. In the marriage example, the pillow is actually substituted for the person. This appears to be a common trap that has accompanied the veneration of icons.

The veneration of an icon is focused on the person of the icon as holy.⁵⁰ This makes the icon itself holy, not because of the inherent holiness of the icon or the person but because of the kenosis of God represented in the person and the icon. Again, this reflects a sacred view of matter as created and infused by the incarnational presence of God. In Orthodoxy, there is no artificial distinction between the sacred and the secular. All reality, including the physical, has the potential to be sacred.

Iconoclastic Controversies and The Defense of Icons

Through the history of the Church, there have been various seasons of resistance to the use of icon. This resistance included most everything from caution

⁴⁹ Giakalis, 1994, p. 121.

⁵⁰ Giakalis, 1994, p. 120.

on the behalf of church leaders to full fledged persecution of those who were even in the possession of icons. We will consider some of the controversy from the first millennium. Barasch suggests that some of the roots of opposition to images can be found in Tertullian.⁵¹ Tertullian opposed art and images. He considered them dangerous and sinful. While this was most likely linked with social and pagan customs, Tertullian taught that the artist was a rebel from God.

Florovsky admits that “The origin, the meaning, and the nature of the Iconoclastic conflict are rather uncertain and obscure”.⁵² However, he traces one root of the iconoclastic controversy to Origen.

But... “Origen’s Christology was utterly inadequate and ambiguous. The whole set of his metaphysical presuppositions made it very difficult for him to integrate the Incarnation, as a unique historical event, into the general scheme of Revelation. Everything historical was but transitory and accidental.” “The whole system of symbols was something provisional, to be ultimately done away.”⁵³

Florovsky also suggests that “... the conflict itself was merely a symptom of sterility of the Byzantine Church.”⁵⁴ It found resonance with the upper class segments of society (the army and court) but never flourished in the lower classes.⁵⁵ He does admit, however, that there were problems with images as early as the fourth century.⁵⁶ This would coincide with the flowering of public religious art subsequent to the Edict of Milan.

Identification with a side of the iconoclastic controversy was often more related to social and political factors than theological ideology. During much of this

⁵¹ Moshe Barasch. *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1992), p. 113ff.

⁵² Florovsky, 1974, p. 101.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 110.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 102.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 106.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 107.

time, monasteries were making money off of “miraculous” icons and the tourism business.⁵⁷ This caused people to have strong opinions on either side of the dispute. This difficult time during Christian history, the age of iconoclasm, can be divided into three phases.⁵⁸ These are:

1. Emergence and development under Leo III (717-740CE) and Constantine V (740-775, and the iconoclastic council of 754CE (Hieria)
2. The Seventh Ecumenical council in Nicea (787CE) – icons okay
3. Iconoclastic revival (815-842CE) and final extinction (up to 867CE)

Prior to the age of iconoclasm, as defined above, a key influence in the practices surrounding icons was the Quinisext Council of 692CE. This council declared that images of Christ should be human, rather than non-human (a lamb for example).⁵⁹ This ruling was based, to some degree, on the understanding that non-human symbols were necessary during times of persecution when the practices of Christianity were done in secret. In 692CE, secrecy was not necessary. The council ordered that symbols from the Old Testament be changed to actual representations – actual people rather than symbols.⁶⁰ In addition, it was decreed that no paintings “corrupted by shameful pleasures” be allowed in Christian worship.⁶¹ This was probably a reaction to some pagan practices of the time, for example, the bacchus feast.⁶² The Pope refused to sign the documents coming out of this council because he perceived error. This represented continuing conflict between the Eastern

⁵⁷ Gennadios Limouris, [Sabev]. *Icons, Windows on Eternity: Theology and Spirituality in Colour*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), p. 49.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 46.

⁵⁹ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 92.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 92.

⁶¹ Zibawi, 1993, p. 91.

⁶² Ouspensky, 1992, p. 98.

churches and Rome. The West has never accepted the decisions of the Quinisext council, however, they are central to the Orthodox tradition.⁶³

In 726CE, Leo III provoked the iconoclastic controversy with an edict that prohibited icons.⁶⁴ Emperor Constantine V (741-75CE) son of Leo III, a theologian, persecuted those who venerated icons, convened Iconoclastic Hieria Council of 754CE.⁶⁵ This council condemned even the possession of icons.⁶⁶ A great deal of persecution followed this ruling but the environment also encouraged the development of the theology and defense of icons. This led to the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

The Seventh Ecumenical Council

The Seventh Ecumenical Council was convened in 787CE under the Empress Irene.⁶⁷ Church leaders were brought together for the purpose of establishing the validity of the existence and veneration of icons. A key document dealing with this council is “*Sacrorum Conciliorum nota et amplissima collectio*” (The Acta Of The Council) edited by D. Mansi.⁶⁸ Giakalis quotes Mansi in defense of the support of icon:

“The iconophiles, then, “represent those things which are seen and contemplated” primarily “as light” – that is to say, the bodies of Christ and of

⁶³ Ibid, p. 99-100.

⁶⁴ Daniel B. Clendenin. *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), p. 84.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 111.

⁶⁷ Clendenin, 1994, p. 85.

⁶⁸ This pivotal twelve volume set published in Florence and Venice from 1759-1798 is often referred to by writings on the Seventh Council. Although I found many references to this work, I did not find the work itself.

the saints, which already shine or will shine “like the sun” in accordance with the teaching of the Gospel.”⁶⁹

A distinct theology of the use of icons in the church came out of this council. Key ideas in this theology included a strong sense of the potential sacredness of matter, the extension of veneration from existing objects (like the cross) to icons and an affirmation of the humanity of Christ himself. This council also considered Old Testament prohibition against the use of images and concluded that certain kinds of images were permissible because of the incarnation. This defense of icons will be discussed here in some detail.

Basically, the iconoclasts refused to allow that matter could be good at all. A root of this ideology was the Platonic idea that the physical world was a mere shadow of the ultimate reality, the spiritual world. In fact, Plato considered painters as contributing to an inferior degree of truth because the painter fostered an inferior part of the soul and impaired the possibilities of reason, which was the sole way to truth.⁷⁰ Matter was seen as the antithesis of spirit, which was good. In other words, God (spirit) is indescribable. However, Zibawi suggests that, although God is indescribable, Christ is fully describable.⁷¹ This demonstrated that, through the incarnation, matter had the potential of being/becoming sacred. “It (the iconoclastic controversy) was not simply a controversy over religious art, but over the entire meaning and implication of the incarnation and its consequent significance for man.” God took a material body, proving that material can be redeemed.⁷²

⁶⁹ Giakalis, [Mansi, 12, 967C] 1994, p. 78.

⁷⁰ Barasch, 1992, p. 129.

⁷¹ Zibawi, 1993, p. 27.

⁷² Calian, 1968, p. 137.

“Those who defended the veneration of the Holy Icons in the troubled times of the eighth and ninth centuries believed they were fighting for the truth of the Incarnation of the Son of God; and they believed that those who attacked the icons were attacking the reality of the Incarnation and the possibility of that revelation being communicated through matter.”⁷³

L’Engle suggests that the “horrendous mistake” of considering that matter, the flesh, is evil while only the spirit is good “...has distorted our understanding of the incarnation ever since.”⁷⁴ Of course, this is largely influenced by a theology of the fall of Adam (and all mankind) that includes the permeation by sin of all of created things. While there is some truth to this theology, there is Old Testament evidence, especially in the Psalms, that creation was still able to declare God’s glory. In other words, all good in creation (matter) has not been destroyed by the fall. It is possible that creation can contribute toward the glory of God. This is ultimately evidenced by the incarnation itself when God actually became part of created things. In fact, Ouspensky augments the significance of this by suggesting that the prohibition of images actually ends with the incarnation of Christ.⁷⁵

In the eyes of the iconodules, the ultimate conclusion of the iconoclastic “heresy” was that it was not possible for God to become fully human in Christ. They went further to say that icons celebrated the incarnation by participating in the redemption of matter. In this sense, veneration of icons was a “...manifestation of honour” not of the image itself but of the person in the image.⁷⁶ This person has the reality of God in him (or her, in the case of Mary and some of the saints).

⁷³ Baggley, 1988, p. 23.

⁷⁴ Madeleine L’Engle. *Penguins and Bolden Calves: Icons and Idols*. (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Pub., 1996), p. 30.

⁷⁵ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 42-44.

⁷⁶ Giakalis [Mansi 13, 56B], 1994, p. 124.

Another element of the defense of icons in the Seventh Ecumenical Council was that veneration already existed in the church and that it was appropriate to add icons to the list of items to be venerated. According to St. John of Damascus, whose teaching were heavily relied on during this council, veneration of the cross was common in the church. Apparently it was also common to venerate the “...lance, the reed, the sponge.”⁷⁷ It was, therefore, no significant leap to venerate an image of the one who was on the cross.⁷⁸ In the same way, “The Eucharist may be considered the image or icon of Christ...”⁷⁹ “For the icon testifies to the basic realities of the Christian faith – to the reality of the divine penetration of the human and natural world, and to the reality of that sanctification which results from this.”⁸⁰ Because it was acceptable to venerate the cross, it was defended that the veneration of icons was also acceptable. This allowed the possibility of the veneration of any material thing that was infused by the reality of God. In essence, this could even include a living person who exemplified commitment and service to God.

Old Testament prohibition against images was discussed in detail at the Seventh Ecumenical Council. Much of this discussion was based on the teaching of St. John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite. They refuted the charges that icon veneration was against Old Testament rules about idolatry with the following arguments:⁸¹ 1. Pagan idols forbidden in the Old Testament were very different from icons. 2. An image of God (the Father) was not only blasphemous, but also

⁷⁷ St. John of Damascus, 1980, p. 64)

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 41.

⁷⁹ Calian, 1968, p. 131. [quoting Philip Sherrard, “The Art of the Icon,” Series 4, No. 6 (1962), p. 295]

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Clendenin, 1994, p. 85-93.

impossible. 3. The tent of meeting was very image oriented and was itself an image. Examples of the images included there were the cherubim, the serpent and the artistic craftsmanship of Bezalel and Oholiab. 4. God became a human body/image/icon in the person of Christ. 5. Not every Old Testament prescription is applicable for the New Testament church (e.g. circumcision, the sacrificial system, the Sabbath). And 6. The prohibition against images has been superceded by the image of Christ – God Himself.

Significant examples of the acceptable use of image in the Old Testament were considered. These included Jacob raising a stele to God, as a result of which he blessed him and promised him gifts (Gen 28:18), and Cherubim of gold made by Bezalel and Oholiab (Exod. 25:18-22). The people of Israel were “saved” by looking at the bronze serpent (Num. 21:9). This image in the Old Testament was not divine but inspirational, yet it had sacred power.⁸² According to Giakalis, the New Testament confirms and affirms the tradition of the Old Testament.⁸³ This clearly demonstrated that, in the Old Testament, “...objects made by human hands do exist for the service and glory of God.”⁸⁴

In addition, the Seventh Ecumenical Council distinguished between absolute worship (for God alone) and relative worship (veneration), which is given to God but also to people, objects, etc. An example of this might be the honor a servant gives to his master or subject to his king.

The Orthodox Church in “The Triumph of Orthodoxy” celebrates the victory of this council annually. This occurs on the first Sunday of Lent. It is a remembrance

⁸² Giakalis, 1994, p. 32.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 31.

the replacing of sacred images in Hagia Sophia (a church in Constantinople) on March 11, 843CE.⁸⁵

Themes and Examples of Icons

The work of an iconographer is very unique in the world of art. This is especially true when icons are compared to the visual art of the west. In the West, self-expression became the ultimate goal. In the Orthodox tradition, there were serious personal and spiritual expectations for one who desired to paint icons. Self-expression was not the goal. An iconographer was not merely an artist. In fact, the Byzantines cast the artist in a priestly light.⁸⁶

Icon painters "...are not considered to be religious artists but rather as persons who have a religious vocation. They are missionaries preaching visual theology. The icon, like the Word, is a revelation, not a decoration or illustration. It is theology in color. More important than being a good artist is the fact that the icon painter be a sincere Christian who prepares himself for his work through fasting, prayer, Confession, Communion and has the feeling that he is but an instrument through whom the Holy Spirit expresses Himself."⁸⁷

It was expected that the icon painter have significant spiritual maturity. Icons were not to be painted lightly. This involved long periods of preparation and contemplation. It was not a frivolous exercise.⁸⁸ In sharp contrast to Western ideas of self-expression in art, the iconographer was to work in service to the church. Personal expression was not only inappropriate but actually forbidden. Iconography is "... a creative activity in which the artist has no initiative, in which he finds the

⁸⁵ *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. IV, No. 3, pp. 49-64.

⁸⁶ Anthony Ugolnik. *The Illuminating Icon*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989), p. 55.

⁸⁷ Coniaris, 1982, p. 177.

⁸⁸ Michel Quenot. *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991), p. 84.

problems and their solutions long since formulated, in which he conforms to a well-established hieratic canon and expresses neither his personal emotions nor the beauty of nature.”⁸⁹ Icons are never painted from the imagination of the painter or from a living model.⁹⁰ Rather, iconographers used existing icons as points of reference. This affirms the Orthodox commitment to tradition. However, Ouspensky suggests that to paint icons as the ancient iconographers painted them did not mean to imitate their style, but rather to imitate their lives, as Paul imitated Christ. This was accomplished not by copying gestures and words but imitating life. “...to follow the sacred tradition, to live the tradition.”⁹¹

Icons have a unique beauty that is also significantly different to ideas of beauty in the West. Beauty in Orthodox understanding is not the beauty of the creature but the potential beauty when God will be “...all in all.”⁹² The icon does not represent corruptible flesh but transfigured flesh. This is divine beauty. In this way, there is a clear distinction between a portrait, which focuses on the corruptible flesh, and an icon which focuses on that which is transfigured.⁹³

Much of this focus on the eternal is accomplished through the use of color and, especially, light. What the Gospel proclaimed by words, the icon proclaimed by color.⁹⁴ Sometimes there is a darkness at the bottom of the icon representing evil and a brightness at the top representing the Divine Presence. Sometimes there is a ladder indicating the possibility of a journey into light. Sometimes there is a hand at

⁸⁹ Mircea Eliade. (Ed. by Diane Apostolos-Cappadona), *Symbolism, the Sacred and the Arts*. (New York, NY: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1986), p. 76.

⁹⁰ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 170.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 160.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 161-162.

⁹⁴ Clendenin, 1994, p. 80.

the top of the icon representing God.⁹⁵ Light permeates the icon like light permeates heaven. There are no shadows. Often, the color gold represents the idea that “...light is called the background of the icon.”⁹⁶ The body of Christ became luminous and in the same way, the bodies of the saints are portrayed as luminous in icons.⁹⁷ The halo or nimbus is also used to convey the idea of the eternal. “The gold nimbus or halo around the head symbolizes the brilliance of Divine Light in the person who lives in the intimacy of God.” – more interest in soul than body.⁹⁸ This is divinity brighter than the sun.⁹⁹ If the icon has a square halo, it indicates that the icon was painted when the person was still alive.¹⁰⁰

Some Physical Features of Icons

Because the intent of iconography was that the artwork be usable in the church for many years, even centuries, a unique process of iconography was developed to ensure preservation. Many layers, consisting of loosely woven linen, a glue and chalk mixture, gold, and egg tempera paint using earth tones, make up the icon. “The icon is an image painted in tempera, with pigments of natural colors mixed into egg yoke. It is painted upon the surface of a wooden board covered with a preparation of plaster mixed with glue.”¹⁰¹ Ouspensky and Lossky suggest that “Layers of paint, superimposed upon another, create a barely perceptible relief, lower in the darks and higher in the lights. In this way the icon is not only painted,

⁹⁵ Bagglely, 1988, p. 79.

⁹⁶ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 192.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 159.

⁹⁸ Quenot, 1991, p. 100.

⁹⁹ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 174.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 176.

¹⁰¹ Zibawi, 1993, p. 64.

but also as it were modeled, according to the traditional requirements of an icon's structure."¹⁰²

The various techniques of painting icons include specific attention to the physical nature of the subject of the icon. Perspective is ignored, as the focus is not on the depth of field in the icon.¹⁰³ The role of the icon is not to bring us closer to what we see in nature (eyes, nose, mouth, ears, etc.) but to emphasize the absence from this world.¹⁰⁴ This represents a resistance to the concept of "natural" beauty as an ideal for the subjects of icons. In fact, "...it would be outrageous to represent Christ according to the natural beauty of some ordinary human model."¹⁰⁵ Rather, an icon is characterized by "...an idealized type unlike any purely human model, with supranatural characteristics such as large eyes, nose and hands."¹⁰⁶ This is common hyperbole used to depict Christ and the saints and contrary to the ideals in the west where young men became actual models for paintings of Christ. These humanly beautiful pictures are unacceptable to the Orthodox tradition.

The people in icons generally have a small mouth, implying that that the saint has no thought for his own life or what he may eat or drink, but seeks first the kingdom of God.¹⁰⁷ Large eyes convey the idea of inner watchfulness and attention. The "...eyes often seem to be inward looking, turned away from the external world of the senses."¹⁰⁸

"Sensual exuberance was discarded by making the mouth smaller, and the nose thinner and longer. The spiritual nature of man was emphasized; the

¹⁰² Ouspensky and Lossky. P. 54.

¹⁰³ Quenot, 1991, p. 106.

¹⁰⁴ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 178.

¹⁰⁵ Coniaris, 1982, p. 173.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 175.

¹⁰⁸ Baggley, 1988, p. 83.

expression of the eyes was also changed. They were no longer the anxious eyes of a person looking with longing on the world dear to him which he was reluctant to leave. On the contrary, the eyes of the saints testified to the peace and contentment of one who has reached his Father's home."¹⁰⁹

When the thumb and 4th finger are joined the upright index finger and the bent middle finger indicates the name IC. The thumb and the 4th finger crossed with the little finger beside indicate XC. IC and XC is an abbreviation for Jesus Christ.¹¹⁰ These written letters also often appear on the icon as part of the halo around Christ's head. Generally, icons portray the person in a direct pose (not profile). This is because of the viewers need to interact with the icon. He/she in the icon interacts with us.¹¹¹ The forehead is often large and high indicating the power of the spirit and of wisdom, inseparable from love.¹¹² The nose is thin and elongated giving nobility to the face. It "...no longer detects the scents of this world, but only the sweet odor of Christ and the life-giving breath of the Spirit gushing from a throat and neck which are disproportionately large."¹¹³ "The mouth, being an extremely sensual organ, is always drawn finely and geometrically, eliminating its sensuality... The lips remain closed, because true contemplation demands silence."¹¹⁴ The body no longer needs nourishment. The ears tend to be interiorized. They no longer need to hear external things but only the "interior voice".¹¹⁵ The absence of naturalism indicates a "...deafness to worldliness".¹¹⁶ "Lengthy fingers and elongated bodies indicate

¹⁰⁹ Nicolas Zernov. *Eastern Christendom: A Study of the Origin and Development of the Eastern Orthodox Church*. (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), p. 278.

¹¹⁰ Baggeley, 1988, p. 85.

¹¹¹ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 187.

¹¹² Quenot, 1991, p. 97.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

dematerialization in the most eloquent way...¹¹⁷ The arched eyebrows signify being “...consumed in the fire of contemplation.”¹¹⁸ In this way, sensual powers are internalized. “The bodies no longer have a sex: naked, Christ, St. Basil the Blessed, or St. Mary the Egyptian have asexual bodies, deeper “inner” bodies, “bodies on the innermost parts of their bodies,” to quote an expression dear to the mystics.”¹¹⁹

Transcendence In Icons

In the icon, the naturalistic is distinguished from spiritualistic. The naturalistic is inadequate, as it is influenced by the fall. Icons do not portray naturalistic ideas or images.¹²⁰ Rather, the transcendent is emphasized. The icon is devoid of emotional explanation. It is a peaceful transmission: “The icon does not represent the divinity. Rather, it indicates man’s participation in the divine life.”¹²¹ Christian art is not to represent everyday life but life infused by the Gospel. Lazarev has given us a number of examples of icons that emphasize a sense of the transcendent – moving beyond this world.¹²² Some examples of this transcendence are: The Holy Face (12th century), Angel (12th century), Saint Nicolas The Wonderworker (13th century), The Apostle Peter (14th century), The Virgin Hodegetria (1482), The Savior Of The Fiery Eye (14th century). Generally, Christ is portrayed as serene when on the cross. This highlights the contrast between the spiritual and the physical and other kinds of pain he must have experienced. The Eastern Orthodox cross always

¹¹⁷ Quenot, 1991, p. 100.

¹¹⁸ Zibawi, 1993, p. 40.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 41.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 47.

¹²¹ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 166.

¹²² Viktor Nikitich Lazarev. *The Russian Icon: From Its Origins to the Sixteenth Century*. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997), p. 142, 144, 148, 194, 316, 252, respectively.

includes the footrest and nameplate. The footrest allows Christ to stand rather than to hand by his arms and hands.¹²³ Again, this contributes to a sense of the transcendent in the icon, and, specifically, in the face of Christ. The subject (Christ) has risen above the things of this world.¹²⁴ We see this same transcendence in the description of the face of Stephen while he is being stoned to death (Acts 7:54-56). This is true of any “transfigured” person in the bible.

Some Examples of Icons

A few examples of icons are included here. In spite of the fact that there are far too many icons to be considered, observation of a few examples is helpful in understanding both iconography and some themes in icons. The physical features of the subjects of icons, discussed earlier, are evident in these examples.

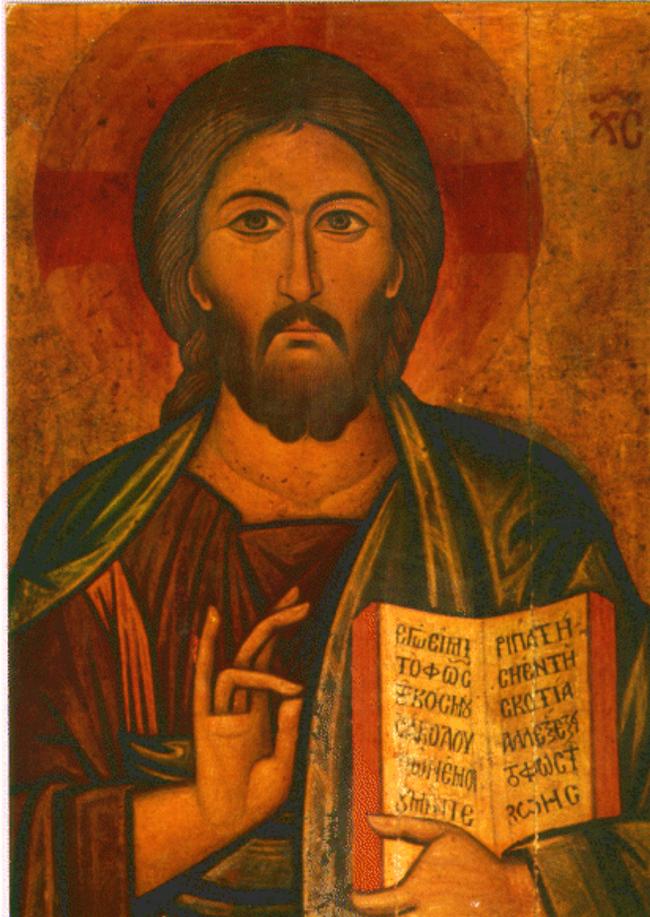
There are many icons of Christ. Some of the most common are the Acheiropoietos Icon (made without human hands) which was discussed earlier, and Pantocrator (the one who presides over the world), seated on the throne, with scroll or book.¹²⁵ An example of Christ Pantocrator is included on the next page.¹²⁶ This icon is found in all Orthodox Churches. It is generally painted in the dome above the center of the Nave.

¹²³ Freiedrich Rest. *Our Christian Symbols*. (Piladelphia, PA: The Christian Education Press., 1954), p. 26.

¹²⁴ Zibawi, 1993, p. 45.

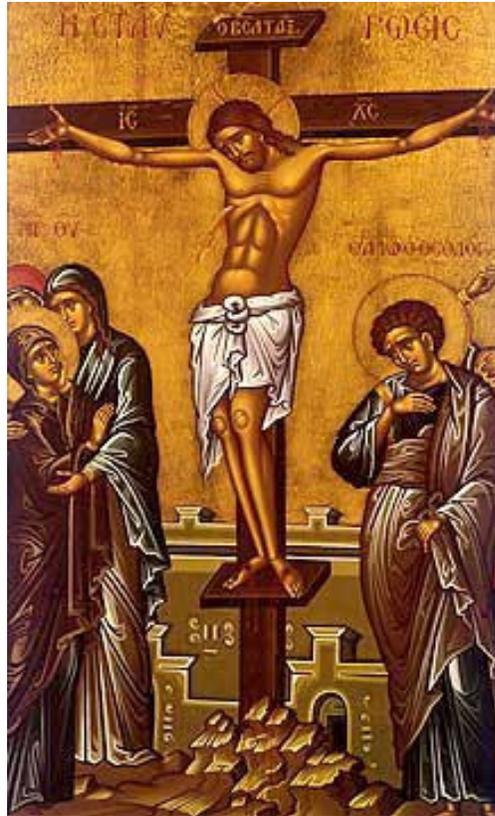
¹²⁵ Ouspensky and Lossky, 1983, p. 73.

¹²⁶ Christ, our Lord. 16th century icon, monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai from the website <http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/icons/data/pantokrator2.gif>



Another example of an icon of Christ is this crucifixion icon. Note the footrest and name plate that is always a part of the Orthodox cross. Also, note that Christ is not hanging on the cross but standing. He exemplifies transcendence above the physical pain of the cross.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ From the website: <http://www.goarch.org/access/resources/clipart/crucifixion.html>



There are also many icons of Mary, the mother of Christ. The Orthodox call Mary “Theotokos” which means “mother of God”. Some examples of icons of Mary include: Our Lady of the Sign – upraised hands, posture of prayer; The Hodigitria – similar looking to Our Lady...; The Smolensk – another version of Theotokos; The Tichvine Mother of God; The Kazan Mother of God – ; The Mother Of God Enthroned.¹²⁸ The example here is the Theotokos.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ouspensky and Lossky, 1983, p. 77-89.

¹²⁹ Mother of God enthroned. Athos, 16th century from the website:
http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/icons/data/theotokos_athos.gif



Another category of icons are the Icons of Loving Kindness. These demonstrate the affection between Mary and the Christ child.¹³⁰ Some examples are: The Vladimir Mother of God – 11th or 12th century; The Tolga Mother of God – 14th century; The Korsun Mother of God – strongly bent head of Mary and Christ (Mary bent down, Christ up); and The Mother of God of the Passion.

Other common icons include important biblical characters like St. John the Forerunner (John the Baptizer) and the apostles. In addition, many of the important

¹³⁰ Ouspensky and Lossky, 1983, p. 92-100.

leaders of the church are portrayed in icons. St. John the Forerunner is portrayed in the following example.¹³¹



The Iconostasis

A dominant feature of an established Orthodox church is the Iconostasis or Icon wall. This is a wall of icons that separates the nave (where the people participate in worship) and the sanctuary (only accessible by the priest). The term iconostasis simply means a partition covered with icons. It attained its classical form in the fifteenth century. In the churches of early Christianity, there was a low screen

¹³¹ Icon of St. John the Baptist, made in Greece 1993 from the website: <http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/icons/data/Baptistis.gif>

or wall. Over time, more icons were added, resulting in a larger wall.¹³² While the first impression one has is that the Iconostasis is a wall, this is a misunderstanding. It is not a barrier but a series of windows. Its purpose is not to block but to bring light into. This is the idea of mystery “perceived not by human eyes”.¹³³ In Russia, the iconostasis was merely a low wall in the 14th and 15th centuries but in the 16th century, “...attains spectacular dimensions.”¹³⁴ Early Iconostasis were low. A man could lean on it and look in, making the sanctuary both visible but also inaccessible.¹³⁵

Basically, the iconostasis tells the story of how we are able to directly approach the holy of holies. Though it appears as a barrier, the icons are meant to be windows to the truth, more than a wall separating us from this truth. It opens the door to the faithful.¹³⁶ “The iconostasis therefore has more than merely a didactic meaning. It represents the ontological link between sacrament and image, and shows this glorious body of Christ, the same real body given in the Eucharist and represented on the icon.”¹³⁷

In the center of the iconostasis we find the Holy (or Royal) Door. This represents the “beginning of our salvation”.¹³⁸ Generally, an icon of Jesus is on one side and the Theotokos is on the other.¹³⁹ This Royal Door is the entrance to the Holy of Holies. Only the clergy may enter and only at certain moments.¹⁴⁰ Here is a

¹³² Quenot, 1991, p. 47.

¹³³ Ibid, p. 48.

¹³⁴ Zibawi, 1993, p. 138.

¹³⁵ Ouspensky and Lossky, 1983, p. 59.

¹³⁶ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 278ff.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 282.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 278.

¹³⁹ Ouspensky and Lossky, 1983, p. 60.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 66.

photograph of the iconostasis in the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Washington, D.C.¹⁴¹



Practical Uses of Icons

Holy icons serve a number of purposes. (1) They enhance the beauty of a church. (2) They instruct us in matters pertaining to the Christian faith. (3) They remind us of this faith. (4) They lift us up to the prototypes, which they symbolize, to a higher level of thought and feeling. (5) They arouse us to imitate the virtues of the holy personages depicted on them. (6) They help to transform us, to sanctify us. (7) They serve as a means of worship and veneration.¹⁴² Madeline L'Engle describes her experience: "...an icon, for me, is an open window to God. An icon is something I can look through and get a wider glimpse of God and God's demands

¹⁴¹ From the website: <http://www.stjohndc.org/tour/touricst.htm>

¹⁴² (Cavarnos, 1992 http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/general/icon_function.htm)

on us, El's mortal children, than I would otherwise.” “...words are inadequate to describe the Maker's love for me and I, the made, to describe my love of the Maker.”¹⁴³ Other possible uses of icon and symbol in an evangelical context will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

¹⁴³ L'Engle, 1996, p. 14.

A Brief Critique of The Orthodox Theology of Icons

This brief critique of the Orthodox understanding and use of icon is designed to be helpful in finding potential application for the use of symbol, and even icon, in an evangelical context.¹⁴⁴ It is understood that an Orthodox person might consider this process inappropriate. However, for the purposes of this project, it is important that these questions are voiced. In any case, discussion surrounding these concerns is important for any person who desires to live in obedience to God.

The Implications of A Theology of Equality Between Image And Word

While there is significant and valuable history regarding the use of images in Christianity, it is somewhat of a leap to equate the authority of image and word. In Orthodox teaching, the word of God is understood as having been given but also as continuing to be given. Mostly, God's word continues to be given through sacred tradition. This is central to the Orthodox understanding of tradition. The Orthodox Church has an extremely high view of the scripture, "... a fundamental view of the sanctity and authority of the bible."¹⁴⁵, but warns against bibliolatry. Unfortunately, the equation of tradition and the bible can be problematic. An evangelical understanding of the Word includes a foundational belief that it is without error. This cannot be said of church tradition. It would be fair to criticize Evangelicals for not holding the tradition of the church in a high enough place, but to equate word and tradition is also questionable.

¹⁴⁴ I feel significant personal tension undertaking this part of the process. My interaction with Orthodox ideology and practice has resulted in great respect for the traditions. I would rather this "critique" be understood as more a series of important questions, rather than an attack or put down of Orthodoxy.

¹⁴⁵ Coniaris, 1982, p. 155.

Contradictions in the Theology of Icons

While a foundational ideology of the icon is that matter and created things have potential to become sacred, some of the ideology actually implies that the physical world is a lower reality. Calian suggests that the icon seeks to convey a structure of ideas – a picture of the divine world order – a picture of how things are in their true state – in the eyes of God – and not as they appear.¹⁴⁶ This implies that the way things appear (the material and physical) is just an image of reality. This is a Platonic idea that seems to be inconsistent with Orthodox theology. A further application of this thought might result in the conclusion that the reality of Christ was not evident in his physical body. His reality was as he appeared but his appearance was merely some kind of shadow of his reality. This appears in contradiction to other Orthodox teaching on the icon, which is very material and incarnational.

The physical characteristics of those portrayed in icons also reflect this problem. The persons in icons have a small mouth – teaching that the saint has no thought for his own life or what he may eat or drink, but seeks first the kingdom of God.¹⁴⁷ According to Ouspensky, the role of the icon is not to bring us closer to what we see in nature (eyes, nose, mouth, ears, etc.) but to emphasize the absence from this world.¹⁴⁸ Limouris suggests that the icon, according to OC thought, is to represent a plane above the physical – the spiritual “...which constitutes the highest truth.”¹⁴⁹ The implication is that the physical (material) has less importance than the

¹⁴⁶ Calian, 1968, p. 131.

¹⁴⁷ Coniaris, 1982, p. 175.

¹⁴⁸ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 178.

¹⁴⁹ Limouris, 1990, p. 100.

spiritual. It seems that this violates the idea of kenosis and the redeeming of creation. To relegate all human desire to the evils of the flesh seems in contradiction to the idea of the possibility of the redemption of creation. It seems highly possible that this reflects a problem of the acceptance of the physical as good. In light of many of the defenses of icons in the first millennium, this seems like a contradiction. The primary defense for icons includes the belief in the actual, physical incarnation of Christ. A reasonable conclusion from this is that the physical Christ had healthy, appropriate, physical desires and pleasures. Certainly we see examples of this in the Gospels. In fact, Christ participated in the joys of eating and drinking to the point that he was accused of being a glutton and drunkard (Matt. 11:19). Therefore, it seems unfair to portray Christ and others in icons as being free from such wholesome physical desires and pleasures. Impassionate portrayals of Christ and others seem to downplay the humanity of Christ. This singular emphasis on transfiguration seems somewhat unbalanced.

When we consider the theme of “other worldliness” in icons, it sometimes appears more like Nirvana than the Kingdom of God. The idea that the subjects of icons have “left this world” as purported by Zibawi (“In this solemn calmness, the whole being is listening to God.”¹⁵⁰) contributes to this almost anti-world sentiment. It is almost as if listening to God means complete detachment from the physical, created world. This appears in contradiction to incarnational theology. A theology that accepts the incarnation of Christ as real and physical, must also accept the possibility of interaction with God, without departure from the physical world.

¹⁵⁰ Zibawi, 1993, p. 54-55.

Orthodoxy And The Other Arts

It seems that the Orthodox so strongly advocate a certain specific kind of art yet neglect the possibility of any other kinds of art for the church. Music is very limited in the Orthodox Church. Sculpture is virtually forbidden and dance and other physical art is unheard of. This appears contradictory in light of the strong theology of visual, two-dimensional art. The reasoning in defense of icon could and should be used in the context of the defense of the other arts as well.

The Dangers of Veneration as Idolatry

It is acknowledged by many Orthodox theologians that there is a significant danger that veneration degenerates into idolatry. In fact, Ouspensky admits that "...there were ways of venerating sacred images which could be mistaken for blasphemy."¹⁵¹ While this does not negate the potential of the use of images in worship, it does raise some questions. How can the pitfalls of idolatry be avoided? How can the distinctions between veneration and adoration, as discussed earlier, be maintained? And what safeguards can be set in place to protect the church against this error? It is unclear that these questions are addressed regularly in the Orthodox Church.

If it is valid to venerate icons, it follows that it is also valid to venerate each other, seeing as we are also in the image of God and sanctified (or in the process of becoming sanctified) matter. This is appropriate, according to Orthodox teaching, but seems to be rarely done. In the Orthodox church, a dead saint seems to be more worthy of veneration than a live one. If all followers of Christ are in the process

¹⁵¹ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 103.

of being sanctified, then it would be appropriate to venerate all members of the body of Christ, whether living or dead. Although this seems appropriate, there are definitely some dangers.

Problems In The Idea of Beauty

Ouspensky suggests that beauty should be inherent to the icon.¹⁵²

However, beauty is a difficult thing to determine. There is much discussion of beauty in regard to icons (and to art in general); yet, beauty is usually a cultural thing. What one culture perceives as beautiful, especially when it comes to human form, another finds unbeautiful. It is clear that the idea of beauty in relation to icon focuses more on the transcendent than the visceral. Natural beauty is no longer important in the face on an icon.¹⁵³ But even this understanding has potential problems. Some find images of nature to contain the transcendent. Yet the icon does not focus on the natural. It seems that beauty in the icon, in spite of historical attempts at standardization, is subject to the ideas of people who live in certain cultures and certain times. This is not inherently problematic, however, it does raise some questions around the idea of what transcendent beauty is. It is truly remarkable that the style and appearance of icons have remained so consistent throughout the history of icon painting.

¹⁵² Ouspensky, 1992, p. 346-347.

¹⁵³ Quenot, 1991, p. 91.

Eliminating the Personality of the Icon Painter

Key to the understanding of the process of painting icons is the idea that the icon painters must eliminate their personality from their work. The basis of this idea is that individual personality in an icon would be distracting.¹⁵⁴ Yet, this is inconsistent with much of the communication between God and man. The biblical writers often identified themselves and their personalities were evident in their writings. Ironically, the subjects in the icon itself are identified personally. Maybe if the iconographer considered himself a saint, he would feel it could be appropriate to be identified. In any case, it is considered inappropriate for the iconographer to identify himself in any way, either through technique or by actually signing the project. This seems inconsistent even with the biblical writings where the authors often identified themselves. The necessity of identity is, however, more an emphasis of western individualism and autonomy than a biblical principle. It just seems that enforced anonymity has the tendency to be non-incarnational. This tension exists in almost every area of practices surrounding icons.

Problems Related to the Iconostasis

According to Orthodox teaching, the iconostasis tells the story of how we are able to directly approach the holy of holies. Though it appears as a barrier, the icons are meant to be windows to the truth, more than a wall separating us from this truth. It opens the door to the faithful.¹⁵⁵ Yet this seems a possible contradiction in that only the clergy are allowed to enter through the royal door into the sanctuary. This

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 72-73.

¹⁵⁵ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 278ff.

reflects Old Testament restrictions on who may enter the Holy of Holies. However, through the redeeming work of Christ, these restrictions of access have been removed. Quenot suggests that this is a misunderstanding. The iconostasis is not a barrier but a window – not to block but to bring light to. This reaffirms the idea of mystery perceived not by human eyes.¹⁵⁶ The iconostasis certainly creates a sense of mystery. But does it also create a sense of prohibition? The examples mentioned earlier, of a shorter icon wall that a person could look over seem to better convey the ideas of mystery *and* accessibility. A theology that so emphasizes the incarnation seems at odds with any sense of barrier between the sanctuary and the believer. Again, the physical is downplayed for the sake of the spiritual. While this is a very important emphasis, especially in a culture rooted in modernity, it seems that it may actually be potentially contradictory in light of the physical incarnation of Christ. Reality exists not only in the spiritual but in the physical as well.

In spite of the questions raised in this section, there is substantial merit to the ideas surrounding the use of icons in worship. Emphases on the mysterious as well as the reality of the spiritual, as opposed to only the physical, are essential to an incarnational relationship with God. At the close of the era of modernity, it seems culture is ripe for an encounter with a theology that emphasizes both the incarnation and transcendence from the material. Post-modernity will continue to hunger for this potentially holistic approach to relationship with the divine.

¹⁵⁶ Quenot, 1991, p. 48.

Symbol In Contemporary Evangelical Churches

While there are significant differences between Evangelical Churches and the Orthodox regarding the basic theological assumptions of the use of symbol and art in worship, there are also significant areas of potential overlap and application. These areas of overlap might be more practical than theological but some kind of appropriate use of symbol and sacred art is essential for any church to be effective in postmodernity. Consideration of the theological principles of the Orthodox use of icon is helpful to development of an appropriate use of symbol in evangelicalism at the dawn of the 21st century.

Differences Between Western and Eastern Theological Perspectives

Western Christianity is marked by a cerebral quality. Orthodoxy is marked more by intuition.¹⁵⁷ In the Western Church, the focus is on getting meaning from words – from a book. Western educators fear that meaning will be lost if the text is lost. The text is central to meaning.¹⁵⁸ For the Orthodox the word is communally celebrated rather than individually encountered. “The Book is the repository of meaning, yet the Book is regarded and treated as if it were itself an image begetting images.” It is image producing – “...transforms dead matter into the reflected image of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁹

“The American Protestant mind is culturally and literarily disposed to envision the Word in terms of a book, the “text” of creation. The Russian Orthodox mind, through the veil of its own culture, interprets that Word in light of the images that reflect it. American Christians obey the Augustinian injunction

¹⁵⁷ Bagglely, 1988, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Ugolnik, 1989, p. 49.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 50.

“Take up and read!” Their Russian counterparts are apt to concentrate upon the insight that follows the imperative “Look up and see!”.¹⁶⁰

This has radically affected the understanding of the role of the artist in the church. “In the West, the theologian has instructed the artist. In the east...the iconographer instructs the theologian.”¹⁶¹ In this sense, the Orthodox Church fuses the aesthetic with the theological.¹⁶² This is in sharp contrast with an Evangelical context “...a church with four whitewashed walls, a slightly out-of-tune piano, and a leader whose expressed intent is ‘to share a few thoughts from the Word.’”¹⁶³ In the Orthodox Church, seeing is valued above hearing.¹⁶⁴

In the Orthodox tradition, aesthetics are valued as central to worship. This creates a climate of potential influence that is significantly different than that in the evangelical church. In the east, word exists in images. In the west, word is spoken. In the east, the central figures are priest and painter. In the west, the central figure is pastor as scholar. Protestant Christianity in this way is professorial.¹⁶⁵ Aesthetics are often perceived as unimportant in evangelical contexts. “In some instances Western Christians even view beauty in a negative light, as something evil, soft, vulnerable, feminine, and fragile, rather than as something tough, disciplined, and rational. Beauty is sometimes considered a distraction...”¹⁶⁶ “In the West Christians typically regard aesthetics as having no importance for their Christian identity; aesthetics is, rather, a matter of private preference or peripheral concern.” There is “...little empathy for social aesthetic, much less a pastoral aesthetic (the

¹⁶⁰ Ugolnik, 1989, p. 52.

¹⁶¹ Calian, 1968, p. 140.

¹⁶² Clendenin, 1994, p. 73.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 72.

¹⁶⁴ Clendenin [John of Damascus, Divine Images 1.17], 1994, p. 75.

¹⁶⁵ Clendenin, 1994, p. 77. see reformation examples of Zwingli and Luther.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 75.

idea that aesthetics can instruct us and urge us toward the good).”¹⁶⁷ Ouspensky goes on to suggest that in the east the church depicts Christ in icons “...not as an ordinary man, but as the God-Man in His glory...”. This is in contrast to Western art, which depicts Christ “...simply as a man who suffers physically.”¹⁶⁸

In the Orthodox Church, intuition and reflection is of *more* value than rational discourse. “Eastern theology originates in the sanctuary, Western theology in the scholar’s study or university library. The one employs candles, frescoes, mosaics, bells, icons, and incense, the other a word processor...In short, in the West theology takes the form of scientific wisdom; in the East it is sacramental worship.”¹⁶⁹ “In the west, the theologian has instructed and even limited the artist, whereas in the East, the iconographer is a charismatic who contemplates the liturgical mysteries and instructs the theologian.”¹⁷⁰

The anti-aesthetic sentiment common to evangelicalism is obviously an inadequate approach for ministry in a post-modern culture. Giakalis suggests that:

“This is the fundamental role of Christian education: to guide one towards saving truth. In contrast with a scientific and rationalistic education, which aims only at the increase of a person’s critical capacity and his application to research, the fundamental data of which must always be changing and advancing, the saving truth of Christian faith remains changeless...”¹⁷¹

Giakalis concludes that icons and teaching by sight is a more effective approach to Christian education.

In the 21st century, a climate of post-modernity, there are significant changes happening in the dialogue between the east and the west. The positive

¹⁶⁷ Clendenin, 1994, p. 75.

¹⁶⁸ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 153.

¹⁶⁹ Clendenin, 1994, p. 79.

¹⁷⁰ Coniaris, 1982, p. 177.

¹⁷¹ Giakalis, 1994, p. 54.

news is that: “We have come from an age of disputes to tone of dialogue, from divergence to convergence, from polemics to irenics.”¹⁷²

Anti-image Sentiment in the Post Reformation Church

John Calvin contested the ecumenical legitimacy of the 7th Ecumenical council. He believed that it wasn't actually ecumenical.¹⁷³ Calvin also said “images cannot stand in the place of books”¹⁷⁴ and that the revelation of God is verbal and oral - not image. Images had value for illustrating the word (words?) but no value beyond that. However, Kretschmar suggests that Calvin “... probably never saw an icon in his life.”¹⁷⁵ This is somewhat ironic in that the term used in I Corinthians in one case for Christ and in another for man is “image” (*eikon*).¹⁷⁶ Yet this anti-image sentiment has persisted through much of the protestant church since the time of Calvin.

Luther was also suspicious of images and saw a dichotomy between an image of Christ and Christ himself. He felt that it was “...intolerable that a Christian should set his heart on images and not on Christ.” He considered this to be superstition.¹⁷⁷ But the “word” is essentially discussion of life – of image. It is not possible to think about the biblical narratives without thinking about some kind of image. It is possible that the protestant emphasis on Word (and arguably, words) was more a result of a combination of the invention of the printing press and a

¹⁷² Calian, 1992, p. 92.

¹⁷³ Limouris, [Kretschmar]1990, p. 79.

¹⁷⁴ Clendenin, 1994, p. 78.

¹⁷⁵ Limouris, [Kretschmar]1990, p. 80.

¹⁷⁶ I Cor. 11:7 – Man is the image of God. II Cor. 4:4 – Christ is the image of God

¹⁷⁷ Limouris, [Kretschmar]1990, p. 81.

reaction against anything Roman than a truly biblical and historical doctrine. Pheidas suggests that the protestant church's suspicion of icons was rooted in the pre-reformation western church, which "...had never been fully capable of incorporating in its tradition the theology on icons of the Eastern Church."¹⁷⁸ It is intriguing and ironic that, in protestant churches, "words" can be put on the wall without suspicion. Yet, these words virtually always inspire image in ones mind. In any case, the Orthodox theology of icons has been largely hidden until the 20th century. For evangelicals it is basically now a new discovery.¹⁷⁹

Many of the concerns of Calvin, Luther and other reformers have been obscured by a contemporary intrigue with anything new. In this sense, the rediscovery of icons, and resulting intrigue, may be more related to a hunger for novelty than to any theological stance.

A Healthy Understanding of Symbol

We have seen that many of the reasons for the lack of use of image in the Protestant churches are reactionary. They stem from observation of the abuses in the various contexts in the church leading up to the Reformation. However, the introduction of symbol, and specifically, icon to contemporary churches must begin with a healthy understanding of symbol itself. The starting point for this understanding can be the content of bible itself. The bible is full of symbol. For example, "The parables fulfill for us the function of icons, by putting forward the efficacy of what they mean, as if it were accessible to sight and to touch, as well as

¹⁷⁸ Limouris, [Pheidas] 1990, p. 20.

¹⁷⁹ Limouris, [Kretschmar]1990, p. 84.

even of those things that may be contemplated invisibly in subtle conceptions.”¹⁸⁰ A healthy understanding of symbol helps us consider the mystery of meaning that is beyond the obvious and physical. In this sense, symbols can “...*participate* in the reality they convey.”¹⁸¹ We “...see the image itself as an emblem of Incarnation.”¹⁸² It provides us with the possibility of participating in the redemption of created things, the sanctification of matter. “It (the icon) is a sanctification of materiality, meant to remind us of its Prototype...” The prototype is the image of the invisible God.¹⁸³

It may be fair to suggest that in real life, it is impossible *not* to have symbol. In the context of evangelicalism, it is important to remember that words themselves are symbols. Language is bound to images. “The meaning of words is necessarily invested with the images that those words suggest.”¹⁸⁴ In this way, the distinction between word and image is somewhat artificial in that all words are symbolic. In fact, in some cases, the priority of words has caused evangelicals to miss the point behind the words, which is the images the words represent. In the same way, there has been some inappropriate separation between the logos (word) and the bible (words). These are inseparable.

The church has maintained symbols from its inception. For example, a symbol of the church (early and contemporary) is the church building. Generally, the gathering place of the body of Christ is treated in a different way from other buildings, no matter how common it is. This indicates symbolic power. The

¹⁸⁰ Giakalis, [Mansi 12, 1067B] 1994, p. 55.

¹⁸¹ Ugolnik, 1989, p. 45.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ugolnik, 1989, p. 45.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 46.

communion table represents symbol. Certainly, we believe the Eucharist should at least be respected, no matter how evangelical (and anti-symbol) we think we are.

A healthy understanding of symbol must contain an appropriate sense of accountability between material reality and spiritual reality. Because evangelicalism is rooted in the enlightenment and subsequent modernity there is often a profound sense of the lack of continuity between the material and the spiritual. Orthodox doctrine is helpful in this light. "... it is endemic to Orthodoxy itself, precisely because "enlightenment" encloses the single, inquiring mind within an isolated, interpreting self separated not only from a creator but from the social framework of other minds."¹⁸⁵ An evangelical post enlightenment understanding of symbol must account for this compartmentalization. Lack of proper theology regarding matter has allowed westerners (and evangelicals in particular) to largely remove accountability in this area. Rather, the relationship between man and matter is seen as autonomous (matter and spirituality are unrelated). North American evangelicals are, for the most part, blind to this fact. This is reflected in treatment of creation as well as in practices of worship. However, this approach is no longer acceptable. For example, the absence of beauty from our contemporary churches has created a hunger for a deeper spirituality and we are experiencing a revival of religious art and icon painting.¹⁸⁶

The contemporary evangelical church exists in a visual age. Protestants need a proper visual theology that is incarnational. "Thus, in a world replete with the images that shower down upon us from billboards, pour from the television screen,

¹⁸⁵ Ugolnik, 1989, p. 66.

¹⁸⁶ Zibawi, 1993, p. 53.

adorn our cities and public parks, and inhabit our entire interior landscape, the religious image has little power of itself to claim its own dominion over the imagination.”¹⁸⁷ Effective ministry will require the appropriate use of symbol. Leadership in this area is important in order to avoid trivialization of the symbolic. In North American culture, religious images are often more fashion statements than true icons, though they sometimes use historical content and appear icon-like. At best they are merely reminders.¹⁸⁸ This leadership is essential because “When the church confines its territory to the heavenly realm alone, it surrenders the material world totally to the secular powers.”¹⁸⁹ We have definitely seen the triumph of the secular in the area of symbol during modernity.

The Possibility of Veneration In The Evangelical Church

Much of the reasoning around the Seventh Ecumenical Council was that veneration already existed in the church. The issue was not whether veneration was a problem but where its practice was appropriate. There were many inappropriate examples that leaned to worship of icons (inappropriate adoration) or superstition. In some cases, problems such as adding flecks of icon paint to the communion wine for luck were happening.¹⁹⁰ However, there were appropriate examples as well. The premise of the reasoning of the Seventh Council was that veneration of icons was very close to other kinds of veneration that was present in the church of the 9th century, and therefore, no great leap.

¹⁸⁷ Ugolnik, 1989, p. 57.

¹⁸⁸ An example of this would be the gold crosses adorning music award show guests or WWJD paraphernalia that is common among younger people.

¹⁸⁹ Ugolnik, 1989, p. 58.

¹⁹⁰ Clendenin, 1994, p. 83.

At first glance, however, it seems this argument is irrelevant for the Evangelical church of today. Most would suggest that veneration does not occur in any context in contemporary evangelicalism. But there are appearances of veneration, even though they would not be considered veneration and certainly admission would be unlikely. Some possible examples of veneration would include the Bible itself. The Evangelical emphasis on the inerrancy of the Bible that permeated the 20th century often appeared like bibliolatry. Specific acts of veneration were not formally required or observed, but the treatment of certain bibles or even versions of bibles was definitely similar to veneration. L'Engle suggests that the Bible is one of our greatest icons and potentially, one of our greatest idols. "The greater an icon is, the more dangerously easy it is for us to turn it into an idol." "When the Bible becomes a thing in itself, rather than the word of God, it becomes an idol."¹⁹¹ In any case, the appearance of veneration has often been present.

Morgan suggests that Protestants interact with pictures of Christ much in the same way that Catholics do.¹⁹² It is debatable whether this exemplifies veneration or merely sentimentalism, but it is definitely interaction beyond the merely cerebral. Morgan refers to a study done by Emile Durkheim who argued, "...social thought can make us see things in the light that suits it". We see Christ in the picture because we want to.¹⁹³ In light of this phenomenon, it is possible for people see Christ in the clouds, for example. Morgan says they see what they want to see. People can

¹⁹¹ L'Engle, 1996, p. 160.

¹⁹² David Morgan. *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 55. This book is based on responses people give regarding the popular artwork of Warner Sallman, and especially, his common picture of Jesus - "Head Of Christ". Many consider this religious kitsch.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 45.

almost always recognize a Sallman picture as one of Jesus. Is this because they have been conditioned to or because they want to?¹⁹⁴ In any case, "...Lutherans, and Protestants generally, find a very important place for images in their religious lives, particularly in their homes."¹⁹⁵ If this is not specifically veneration, it is very similar. It is certainly a religious use of images.

Another potential example of veneration for the evangelical context might be the act of preaching. In fact, there are obvious similarities in ideology and terminology between the Orthodox understanding of icon and the Evangelical understanding of preaching. Often, preaching is referred to as opening the word. This terminology treats preaching like a window, which is exactly the Orthodox picture of the icon. Ironically, preaching is mostly explaining of the word rather than the reading of the word itself. Evangelicals would not call this explanation "the word" yet treat it in a similar way. Again, honor accorded to preaching is strikingly similar to the honor given to icons.

Another significant example of possible veneration in the Evangelical context is prayer itself. When Evangelicals pray, they often assume some unique position. This could be simply closing eyes but could also include kneeling, folding of hands and bowing. These are all acts consistent with veneration. In fact, it is impossible to pray without some kind of image, even if it is only imagined – how can one pray with no image? There is always a sense of an image in prayer, whether it is an image of God or something else. It could be argued that if one prays without an image of God (whether physical or not) or at least some sense of the location of God (even if it is

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 125.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 152.

inside the one praying), one is participating in idolatry. Certainly, much of historical and contemporary worship practices are metaphorical and image oriented.

A final example of veneration in the Evangelical context will be considered. This is the example of music. This veneration can be easily seen in the context of “contemporary” worship. To the uninitiated, the first exposure to contemporary worship practices would definitely appear to be veneration. In many of these contexts, there is only one time during a corporate worship service when people will either shut their eyes, bow, sway, raise hands or perform a number of other physical acts. This is during the participatory music, often identified as “worship” in evangelical churches. In fact, in many of these contexts, *the only* component of the corporate worship service referred to as worship is the participatory music. Whether it is intentional or not, these are acts of veneration. The music provides the window to the supernatural in the same way that the icon does. The similarities are significant.

The point of this discussion is not to condemn the Evangelical church for practices of veneration. Rather, it is to affirm that certain kinds of veneration exist in the Evangelical church already. To include the honoring sacred images along with the acts common to the practices of prayer, the place of the bible, the act of preaching and participation in music is not a significant leap. In fact, in post-modernity, the use of visual symbol (image) is essential for a holistic worship experience. The days when corporate worship could be primarily cerebral are past. Certainly, it would be inappropriate if worship did not have a cerebral component, but a more holistic inclusion of participatory music, prayer, reading of the scripture

and use of sacred symbol is essential to the effective leadership of corporate worship today. It is apparent that this is also true of much of the worship over the past 2000 years. The iconoclastic tendencies of the western churches have been largely reactionary. It is time that the richness of various historical traditions, including those of sacred images, is included in Evangelical worship of the 21st century.

The Proper Introduction of Icon

Introducing the use of sacred image to the contemporary churches must be done in a very careful manner. The 20th century was full of the rediscovery of icons. This is largely because the technique of removing paint that had previously covered them was developed.¹⁹⁶ There is a danger that fascination with sacred images may simply be an interest in novelty. The Orthodox are concerned that the use of sacred images and the icons themselves are not trivialized. In fact, the popularity of ancient icons in the west today is considered blasphemous, a distortion of their purpose.¹⁹⁷ Giakalis declares "...no one apart from the believer has any right to put up icons of holy persons and the events of sacred history." It is quite possible that he might amend this statement to exclude non-Orthodox believers. A trendy use of icons, more for art or decoration outside of true religion, is profane. Icons are not "art" or "mementos".¹⁹⁸

Developing and maintaining an understanding of the sacred is essential for the journey into the appropriate use of image in Evangelicalism. Ouspensky's

¹⁹⁶ Lazarev, 1997, p. 11.

¹⁹⁷ Coniaris, 1982, p. 171.

¹⁹⁸ Giakalis, 1994, p. 62-63.

exhortation to avoid Images that might “arouse shameful pleasures” (prohibited by the Quinisext council) is a good start.¹⁹⁹ However, it is extremely difficult to identify these universally. What might arouse one person (man) might not arouse another. It may even be, as is common in North American culture, that the withholding of the image arouses. Also, it may not be the fault of the image but of the viewer. Nudity in art is a potential example of this. Or dancing. Icons depicting the narrative of the Song of Songs are difficult to find. Yet this is part of life, the scripture and a healthy incarnational theology.

It seems that the dangers lie more in the potential for evangelicals to focus trivial symbols. Current examples like the WWJD apparel, the “testamint” candies and other very questionable uses of symbol are rampant. Church leaders must develop a thoughtful and discerning approach to the use of symbol in worship. This approach must be rooted in meditation on the scripture, immersion in the historical practices of the church, and personal use of sacred images in devotion. In this way, it is possible to avoid the dangers of either embracing a trivial image or trivializing those that have a rich sacred history. In accordance with Orthodox teaching, these things are not to be approached lightly. Rather, they are to be approached with prayer and submission to the will of God.

¹⁹⁹ Ouspensky, 1992, p. 98.

Practical Applications for Evangelical Churches

The use of symbol and image is essential for effective ministry in our increasingly post-modern culture. Therefore, it is crucial that church leaders proactively introduce appropriate images in the context of worship. These are some practical suggestions that might help with this introduction. Of course, the possibilities are myriad. These are only a few.

Teaching on Images

In light of the negative perception about images that has historically plagued evangelicalism, teaching will be an important aspect of their introduction. In light of the fact that post-modern culture is very open to both image and historical ideas, the focus of this teaching should be a combination of church history and theology. Rediscovery of some of the teaching of St. John of Damascus as well as the conclusions of the 7th Ecumenical Council will be helpful for the introduction of icons. The Orthodox emphasis on incarnation is also very important. Evangelicals have historically ignored the world of created things as it relates to worship. Implied in this ignorance has been the error that the divinity of Christ somehow reduced his humanity. The introduction of image and its accompanying theology is an excellent opportunity to reemphasize the essential doctrine of the humanity of Christ.

In many evangelical contexts, icons are perceived with some suspicion. This may be because of some teaching against them in the past or simply because they are new to most people. As part of the introduction of icon, it will be valuable to begin teaching on the use of other similar mediums that are more familiar. For

example, a discussion around the use of music as a window for worship will help people understand the potential for image as a window to the divine. Beginning with the familiar will be very helpful in the introduction of the less familiar.

Included in this teaching must be an acknowledgement that the Bible itself is image. Written words are images of spoken words, which are images of ideas and events. As evangelical churches come to understand this, it will be easier to accept other kinds of images. It is essential, however, that serious consideration be given to the appropriate nature of the images introduced. There is very little discernment in post-modern culture. Symbols are embraced without thought, often simply because of association with a famous figure²⁰⁰. This should not be the case with images introduced into worship. This is why historical images are probably safer than contemporary images. New images have not stood the test and scrutiny of tradition and are more likely to be trivial. This is not to say that there should not be new images. It is just more likely that trivial images will be avoided if a relatively steady diet of established historical images is normative. In other words, consistent exposure to that which is historically excellent and true will help create an environment of discernment that can spot that which is not excellent and true.

²⁰⁰ The most significant example of this in contemporary culture is the use of commercial logos and name brands. If a celebrity wears a name brand or logo (often because he or she is paid to do it) others will desire to wear it as well.

Images on PowerPoint

Many churches today are using various projection technology. This technology has inherent problems that should be considered²⁰¹ however, it also has potential for introduction of symbol. During various times in the context of corporate worship it would be appropriate to project symbols for contemplation. This suggestion assumes that teaching has already taken place so the people understand the ideas behind the use of image. This use of image could be especially valuable as applied specifically to the various seasons of the church calendar. For example, there is a richness of image available around the seasons of Christmas, Epiphany and Easter.

Icons for the Home

Evangelicalism has historically heralded the importance of the printed word. Parishioners have been exhorted to read the bible for themselves – to learn to interpret and live the text. This has been the icon of choice for the home in modernity. Increasingly, however, music has played a similar role. Most evangelical church members own “worship” CDs, which they play in their homes and cars. This is a way for people to take home their corporate worship experience.

In many contexts, it may be appropriate to provide icons for worshipers to take to their homes. This is especially valuable if an icon has been used a number of times in corporate worship and there has been teaching on the substance and content of that icon. There are many places where individual icons can be

²⁰¹ See Neil Postman, *Technopoly* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992) for a detailed discussion regarding the potential dangers of technology in contemporary society. Postman suggests that technology has the potential to contribute to the trivialization of symbol.

purchased for home use. This provides the excellent possibility that corporate worship will continue into the personal and home lives of parishioners.

Seriousness of The Arts As They Relate To Faith

In an era where the arts are either popularized for the sake of financial gain or intellectualized to the point where they are no longer accessible to the general public, it is important that the church develop a proper approach to the use of the arts in worship. The Orthodox have much to teach in this area. The priestly role of the artist in Eastern churches establishes both a level of respect for those who paint as well as a significant level of accountability. In the West, it is often assumed that “artsy” people will be emotionally unstable and theologically weak. In a very real sense, this attitude has contributed to its reality – many of them fit the description. However, the priestly conception of the artist assumes significant spiritual maturity and commitment to contemplation. This kind of accountability of the artist raises the standard and expectation about lifestyle and spirituality. Evangelical churches can do this. Rather than consider spiritual maturity only important for those who deal with words, the expectation should be extended to those who deal with any kind of image.²⁰² In other words, the artist (including the musician) should have the same level of accountability as the preacher. This is consistent with Orthodox ideology and is essential for the appropriate use of image in evangelical post-modernity.

It is possible that a key outcome of a renewed seriousness about the priestly nature of the artist is that there will also be a renewed interest in a different kind of

²⁰² This can and should be extended to all areas of the arts, including music. If the same expectations were in place for those who lead in musical worship, there would be far less likelihood of poor theology in our hymns and songs as well.

training for the arts in the church. In most of past evangelicalism, training in the arts has focused on skill rather than a pastoral and theological emphasis. In this way, the artist has been seen as a less significant contributor to those who handle words. However, if the approach to artistic training has more to do with theology and spirituality but includes technique and skill, it is possible that artists will have the potential to take their place as priest in the body of Christ.

Conclusion

The title of this project is “*The Theology and Use Of Icons In Orthodox Churches and Potential Applications For The Use Of Symbol In Contemporary Evangelical Churches*”. In many ways, this has been a journey in the attempt to identify whether the icon *even has* potential for application in evangelical post-modernity. In conclusion, the resounding answer is “yes”! In fact, it is very likely that a theologically appropriate use of image in evangelical post-modernity is essential for effective ministry. Evangelicals have the profound and unique opportunity to radically influence the introduction of images into worship. Rather than just “let it happen” it is extremely important that images be introduced in a thoughtful and careful way. This will provide the potential for stable long-term use of image and, potentially other of the arts as well. If image is not introduced in a careful, thoughtful way, it is likely that the future of evangelicalism will hold yet another iconoclasm, because iconoclasm often is not a result of the use of image but the *inappropriate* use of image. The time is ripe for the prevention of this future iconoclasm and the blessing of the introduction of the use of symbol in contemporary evangelical churches.

Glossary²⁰³

Acathistus Hymn	A Greek liturgical hymn in honor of the Mother of God said standing, hence its title Acathistus (“not sitting”)
Anamnesis	Remembrance, commemoration: the Eucharistic anamnesis recalls the work of salvation that God accomplished and the institution of the Lord’s Supper
Apophatic	Refers to a spirituality which emphasizes the inadequacy of human language to express anything about God
Assiste	Features and lines of gold decorating certain elements of iconography, such as the vestments and the wings of angels
Deesis	Literally “supplication”; specifically, a representation of the Holy Mother of God and St. John the Baptist standing on either side of Christ and imploring mercy for the world
Hesychasm	Retreat of the created into silence, calmness, quiet, and solitude
Hodegitria	“She Who Shows the Way”; a representation of the Mother of God holding the Child in her left arm and pointing to him with her right hand
Hypostatic Union	The union of the divine and human natures of Christ in one hypostasis, or substance
Iconoclast	One who believes religious images are idols and those who venerate them are idolaters
Iconodule	One who venerates religious images, but does not worship them
Iconolater	One who worships religious images
Iconostasis	A partition, made up of icons, that separates the sanctuary from the nave
Kenosis	Literally, “emptying”; specifically, the impoverishment of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity when he willingly assumed human nature

²⁰³ This is taken from Mahmoud Zibawi, *Eastern Christian Worlds*. (Collegville: The Liturgical Press, 1995) p. 271-272, and Mahmoud Zibawi. *The Icon: Its Meaning and History*. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993) p. 173-174.

Mandyllion	A cloak, a small cloth, a napkin
Maphorion	A garment covering the head and shoulders and traditionally worn by the Mother of God and holy women in artistic representation
Monophysitism	A doctrine that Christ possessed one source of activity or “energy”
Nestorians	Those who believe there are two separate Persons in Christ, one divine, the other human
Orant	A representation of the Mother of God or a Saint with arms extended and hands raised to shoulder level or higher in a gesture of prayer
Pantocrator	Christ represented as Ruler of Everything
Proskynesis	Gesture of prostration and reverence
Quinisext	A 7 th century council complementary to the use of icon
Theotokos	Mary, Mother of God
Theosophy	A belief in intuitive knowledge of the Divine which is superior to that of historical religions or of philosophy or empirical science
Zoographe	An iconographer, a painter

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Specific Icon Website: http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/icons/misc_in.html

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