

A THEOLOGY OF IMAGE (FOR USE OF PROJECTION TECHNOLOGY IN
CONGREGATIONAL SETTINGS)

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Summary:

This paper presents a compelling argument for the use of images in contemporary corporate worship. Included is a study of the history of icons (images) and related theological controversy. The paper also provides some helpful suggestions regarding the careful introduction of projection of images in contemporary ministry contexts.

Length: 62 pages

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INTRODUCTION

As you settle into your chair, looking over the program handed to you by the usher, suddenly you sense the lights dim, ever so gently. The music that has been playing in the background softens and your eyes are drawn to images projected on the large screen in front of you.

A few of the weekly announcements, perhaps a Scripture reading and lyrics to the songs that are sung all go flashing by on the screen. A video clip from a popular movie and some cute animations with the sermon notes and you're headed back home again to your television and computer. It is then that the thought crosses your mind: Is this really what should be happening when the community of faith comes together?

Technology has made significant strides over the last twenty or thirty years, perhaps more changes have taken place in that time than in any thirty year span previously in our history. Projection technology is no exception. It's use is beginning to find its way into more and more areas of our lives, including our church services. Through this medium, images, icons (objects and art used to convey Christian truth) and video are becoming more prevalent in our services, but not without trepidation. Change is never easy to adapt to, particularly when it comes to perceived extra-biblical changes within our congregational settings.

That image/icon can be displayed in diverse ways through the use of current technology is viewed by some to be an intrusion of worldly values and practices into the holy places of worship. Those who feel this way seek to protect what they regard as acceptable practices for corporate worship of which image/icon, particularly through technological advancement, should

not play a part. In so doing they distance themselves from those who have been raised in this technological age. They fail to speak the language of the culture.

To others, the opportunities that technology provides to enhance the church service experience should not be neglected. For them there is little doubt that this is the manner to attract and keep a new generation of believers in the church. As daily life increases in its dependence on technology, shouldn't that spill over into our congregational settings? Recognizing the difficulty of counteracting tradition, new churches are being started with the use of current technology as the centerpiece. Is a further fragmentation of the body of Christ the answer to our technological questions?

At this stage of development it is important to discern their value to inspire worship of God rather than simply displaying pictures and videos because technology makes them more readily available for congregational use and perhaps they're more aesthetically pleasing. There needs to be intentional consideration for bringing images/icons back into our worship space with the purpose of providing a "window" to the holiness of God. Therefore it will also be foundational to recognize God's instructions regarding these issues in the Scripture he has given.

Fortunately, we need not wrestle with this issue alone. History exists that we might learn from it. Within the context of integrating image/icon through projection technology into our church life that historical reference can be found within the workings of the Iconoclastic Controversy. This study will not attempt to argue the merits of either side of the 7th Ecumenical Council, rather will use its development as a lens through which to discern current steps in the use of projected image.

Involved with that development will be how the use of image/icon has changed throughout the course of history. A brief look at the impact of Reformation thought will be

addressed. Additionally, a survey of the puritan movement, as it relates to the use of image/icon, will be examined because of its direct influence on the heritage of our Western worship practices.

For those who would push forward that our churches reflect the progress of the times, this study will seek to provide the opportunity to empathize with those who resist the infiltration of media and technology in our corporate worship settings. It will also seek to provide some important considerations to be mindful of in the use of projection technology: What was the purpose of the image/icon? What was the role of the artist?

For those who have inherent fears about the changes that technology will bring, this study will seek to bring the insight learned through the unfolding of historical tensions concerning image/icon use, and therefore demonstrate why fear of technological influence need not prohibit the church from projecting images for the purpose of glorifying the Lord. Rather this study will attempt to provoke further questions regarding the implications of its use.

While the reasons for the stagnation in the growth of many Western churches are broad, this study will serve to address one of the significant points of tension. Instead of birthing new churches because of differing opinions about the use of technology in congregational settings, this study is aimed at promoting church growth across the generations with unified congregations; one that does not fear the use of images through projection technology.

SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Exodus 20:4-6

A Scriptural Perspective on Adoration

From a historical western evangelical perspective there has been a tendency to avoid the use of image/icon in our worship gatherings. Those who strongly support that view tend to wield the inclusion of the second commandment (above) as the beginning and ending point of any conversation on the matter.

There is no disputing God's intention with this commandment. He provides detail on the extent to which we should avoid idols and even more detail on the significance of allowing them to be the object of our worship. God seems clear: "don't make idols" and with the ones that are made, "don't worship idols". To reinforce his stance against adoration (worship) of idols, God includes strong language that ought to inspire anyone to consider carefully the manner in which they worship.

To illustrate the point, Exodus 32, gives a picture of how fickle and wayward the heart of people can be. We have a tendency to need to worship something and when we lose our focus on who God is, we are quick to replace that position. The Israelites grew impatient while waiting for Moses to descend from the mountain. A golden idol was made in the image of a calf. The Israelites then began to worship and celebrate that idol.

These actions taken by Aaron and the Israelites are what provide definition to idolatrous adoration. Worship and credit is attributed to an object that they had created with their hands and with material they provided. The perplexing part is that this ‘god’ idol is credited with and worshiped for experiences that occurred before it had even been created.

“These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of Egypt.”
Exodus 32:4¹

This is the type of confusion for which God has designed the second commandment protection. He understands our capacity to be thrown into disarray by our affections. Jacques Ellul captures the essence of idolatry and the confusion it displays about us: “Symbols become idols when the elasticity between truth and its symbols is frozen into a stereotype that humanity can finally possess.”² This kind of confusion led the Israelites to seek an immediate solution for their wandering hearts.

We have a natural inclination to disregard the faith aspect of worshiping God, who is transcendent above the earth and beyond definition, and instead look for opportunities to define God in our terms. What the Israelites wanted was something beautiful on which to fix their attention. It was that desire for defined beauty above their desire for transcendent worship that defined the sin of the second commandment.³

This aspect is what becomes integral in distinguishing between adoration and veneration. When adoration is fixed upon and attributed to an object (i.e. the golden calf) then that object becomes an idol and the adoration given becomes idolatry, which God opposes.

¹ All Scripture citations are from the New International Version (unless otherwise indicated).

² Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1985), 88.

³ Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship*. (Downers Grove IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 165-7.

There are dangers of idolatry and perhaps this is also why many western traditions have sought to formally or informally draw a line that serves to protect against the fabricating of another golden calf.

It would be easy to assume then that the danger of idolatry could be present in other forms of art such as pictures, drawings, and paintings. These forms, just like the example of ancient idols, could also fall victim to the weakness of our natural inclination and lead us to choose “art primarily for the results it produces, rather than to glorify God.”⁴ The use of art forms for aesthetic purposes satisfies the desire for the beautiful, but often falls short of conveying the sense of God’s transcendence.

The New Testament furthers the discussion of idolatry by moving the dangers from the external to the internal by including the greedy, selfish motivation of human desire (Colossians 3:5: Eph. 5:5). Certainly there is no disputing the fact that in the final stages of God’s redemptive plan, eternal punishment will be handed down to a list of people, among whom will be “idolaters” (Rev. 21:8). The fabrication of idols and the worship of idols is not a vague portion of Scripture rather, there is a consistency of recognizing the temptation toward idolatry that we all face with adoration and the serious manner in which God deals with it.

A Scriptural Perspective on Veneration

Veneration, like idolatry, has a symbol or artifact involved. Those who approve of and promote veneration generally understand the clear command of Scripture regarding idolatry. Like the Iconoclasts of the eighth century, they do not seek to diminish nor neglect those commands. The difficulty regarding veneration does not arise because the teaching of Scripture

⁴ Ibid.,168

is unclear. Rather, it seems as though the resistance to the veneration of image/icon exists because of ecclesiastical traditions that fail to understand its revelatory capacity and thus have tried to control it from devolving into idolatrous uses.⁵ Veneration occurs when the object is used to point to beyond itself to the eternal truths and indefinable character of God. God is against idolatry, but God encourages and even initiates veneration.

From within the context of God giving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) a great amount of intrigue is aroused into the differences between veneration and adoration. According to Ouspensky, the heart of the intrigue is not distinguishing between veneration and adoration as it relates to the icon, rather “the agreement or disagreement of this testimony with the Christian revelation.”⁶

The Israelites knew that Moses had gone to meet with God. In fact God gave them signs (Exodus 20:18-21) to know that he was present. There was thunder, lightning, trumpet sounding, smoke and imposing darkness. While these signs were not necessary, they were all used as indicators to the entire nation of Israel that God was present on the mountain. God had also provided in the past, and would again in the future, a pillar of cloud, by day, and a pillar of fire by night. Both of these signs were given to remind the Israelites that God was leading them.

The Exodus account also seems to be deliberate in demonstrating that even while the Israelites were busy giving into their selfish need to define worship in the image of an idol, God was also at work at providing specific objects that would serve to venerate him, that is, to direct the people’s attention and worship toward Him.

⁵ Mahmoud Zibawi, *The Icon: Its Meaning and History*. (Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 26.

⁶ Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon, Volume I*. Trans. By Anthony Gythiel and Elizabeth Meyendorff. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1992), 40.

This word was not meant to stifle artistic talent but only to avoid improper substitutes that, like the idols of Canaan, would steal hearts away from the true worship of God. One need consider the tabernacle with its ornate appointments – all under divine instruction – to see that making representations is not absolutely forbidden.⁷

Although the commandments contain a direction against idol worship, they were written on tablets of stone by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18; 32:15-16). They were to be stored in an ark (Exodus 37:1-9), made to the ornate specifications that God provided. The ark was to be stored in a temple or tabernacle (Exodus 36:8-38) that was uniquely constructed and furnished according to God’s instructions (Exodus 37:10-38:31). The temple was to be attended by people of specific qualification and dressed with specific apparel (Exodus 39:1-31). All of this was done so that the Israelites and other nations would have physical reminders of God, who would remain transcendent.

In viewing the tabernacle, honouring the instructions, and participating in the sacrifices, the Israelites would worship God. Their worship would not be contained or defined by these representations. Instead, the representations would serve to enable their worship to extend beyond the physical to God, recognizing of him as the initiator of their worship.⁸ Therefore, whether it is the tablets, the temple or other objects, God does seem to invite veneration through humanly crafted objects. “It is the experience of the Spirit, as participation in God’s life and anticipation of ultimate union, that gives us a taste for what is spiritual in sacred art and allows us to be moved by it and so enter into its movement.”⁹

To Noah (Genesis 9:9-17) it was the rainbow that would remind him of God’s activity in the past and God’s promise of redemption in the future. To Abraham (Genesis 15:4-7) it was the

⁷ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. , “Exodus” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 422-3.

⁸ Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 160.

⁹ *Ibid.* 163.

stars that shining in the night sky that would remind him of the vastness of God's redeeming grace. There was no sufficiency or mystic value in either of those elements, but each would serve as a portal to the holiness of God. Both symbols served as a reminder of his past faithfulness, and to create a longing for the promises yet to be realized.

Stop for a moment and think about Noah. He would have a different perspective on the next rainbow he would see. While others might gaze at the brilliant colours or its span, Noah would be thinking about God, and be drawn in to worship. That is veneration: Encountering God beyond the symbol.

The unfolding of Scripture brings these concepts of veneration into focus as well. The Psalms are filled with reminders of "creation, in a myriad of ways, is endlessly praising its Creator. In all its colour, movement, subtlety, richness, diversity and splendour, it brings glory to God."¹⁰ In the book of Job, chapters 38 and 39, the Lord gives Job a long list of natural occurrences to examine. But his challenge isn't simply to see if Job can recognize or affirm them. Rather God is challenging Job to consider their source or cause.

God demonstrates the mystical elements of veneration, but diffuses the mystery. By giving instruction to Moses regarding the building of the tabernacle, and to Job regarding elements of the creative order, God affirms the objects as symbols through which his glory, sovereignty, majesty and holiness can be known. However, God does not provide the details of what their understanding should be or how that should translate into their lives. He leaves that up to the one who encounters the object.

The primary venerating object, is Jesus Christ, "the Word become flesh" (John 1:14) who is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15) and through whom we see the glory of

¹⁰ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 177.

God. “He who became incarnate became the visible image of the invisible. And today we meet him not only with our ears but also with our eyes.”¹¹ The choice to respond to Jesus as the revealed glory of God is not dictated but remains very individual. However, the choice does not diminish the capacity of the Incarnated Son of God to venerate.

Throughout the gospel accounts contained in the New Testament, Jesus furthered the concept of veneration by challenging his followers to incorporate it into their faith in God. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is filled with symbolic representations that have no power or enabling of themselves but point to their source in God. Most notably, Jesus challenges his followers not to worry about present day troubles (Matt. 6:25-34) such as food or clothes. Instead, Jesus says to demonstrate our faith, by considering the “birds of the air” and the “lilies of the field”. In so doing we will be drawn into remembering that God cares for us in even greater ways. The symbol points us to God and draws us into his presence. That is veneration.

God’s request is not to admire or revel in what we see, but to use what we see as a reminder of just how diverse and indefinable he is. In that sense, according to Thiessen, the symbolism used in veneration becomes a deeply theological exercise, instituted by God in various forms through scripture. “Therefore the methods used by iconography for pointing to the Kingdom of God can only be figurative, symbolical, like the language of the parables in the Holy Scriptures. But the content expressed in this symbolical language is immutable, both in the Scripture and in the liturgical image.”¹²

¹¹ Jeremy Begbie, *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 84.

¹² Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen (Editor), *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*. (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing Co., 2004), 356.

Preliminary Conclusions

The scriptural overview that precedes this is by no means exhaustive. There are myriad other texts that would lend support to both sides of the adoration and veneration debate. For the purposes of this study, it is apparent that God speaks clearly about the dangers of idols and what they reveal about our need to control and define worship. “In this respect idolatry is the difference between walking in the light and creating our own light to walk in.”¹³

It is equally apparent that God sets before us an example of instructing and enabling veneration through symbolic and natural forms. The goal of which is not to define his character in human terms, but to draw the human heart into the vastness of his holiness. The symbols allow our finite minds unique and diverse windows into a greater discovery, protection and contentment in his character and Kingdom.

The icon is a symbol, but must be surpassed; though nothing in itself, it is indispensable in mystical contemplation. As a kind of sacrament that makes transcendent communion possible, in itself it is transcendent. The icon alone enables a person to participate in the indescribable...The icon guides our gaze toward the Highest – toward the Most High, toward the only necessity.¹⁴

The dangerous temptation to drift toward an emphasis of temporal beauty (idolatry) instead of faithfully engaging our soul, mind and spirit toward the transcendent presence of the God of Creation (veneration) will be a continual battle both for individuals, and for corporate gatherings. What we need to recognize from a scriptural point of view is that God is speaking strongly and clearly on both idolatry and veneration. He has not imposed the prohibition of the former to the neglect of the latter. Therefore, even in a technological age the use of image (stills and video), icon and symbol should be handled in a manner that leads people to greater

¹³ Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship*. (Downers Grove IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 166.

¹⁴ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1985), 103.

adoration and worship of God, and is reflected by “total engagement of the Church with God in Christ.”¹⁵

¹⁵ H. Cunliff-Jones, *Technology, Community and Church*. (Independent Press, London, England. 1961), 144.

HISTORICAL USE OF IMAGES

An Examination of the Seventh Ecumenical Council

“The arts are not simply an aid to worship; they are the means of worship when Christians use them as the occasion to respond to God. Christians who scorn contact with art are missing a great opportunity to praise God.”¹⁶

Although these thoughts come from the twentieth century they echo the sentiments and address the issues that were prevalent for Christians 1100 years before. Can God use art to convey truth? Can the believer draw near to God through the witness of artistic expression? The Iconoclastic Controversy coloured the Christian landscape for over a hundred years (726 – 843) and at times was disgracefully marked by hatred and persecution. Nevertheless it ultimately served as a reminder that all aspects of life, including artistic expression, have not gone unnoticed by our Most Holy God. The controversy served as a reminder that artistic expression can venerate God by pointing or moving the viewer beyond the physical representation into consideration of the spiritual thoughts it depicts, the visible to the invisible.

“The iconoclastic controversy of the eighth century was about the legitimacy of using an earthly visible human image to depict the one, invisible reality of God.”¹⁷ However, the controversy is rooted in the development and use of symbolic art (icons) by Christians within the context of local church assemblies. As the centuries passed the symbols (i.e. cross, lamb) created moved from the simplistic to progressively more descriptive (i.e. Christ on the cross) and eventually became a viable tool for the teaching of biblical truth both with a historical and

¹⁶ Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989), 267.

¹⁷ Thomas A. Idinopulos, Review of “Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons” by Jaroslave Pelikan. (*Christian Century* 108.10), 337-338.

missiological perspective.¹⁸ Those who supported and practiced such a view were called either Iconophiles or Iconodules. Those who opposed the use of image/icon were called Iconoclasts. The point of contention that arose at that time was not simply the preference for artistic expression through paint or sculpture. The differences became passionate because of the disagreement the use of image/icon as a viable revelatory expression of a Holy God.¹⁹

Developing an understanding of the Iconoclastic controversy is a key facet of this study. The merits of both sides of this debate will provide a lens through which we can learn how to effectively use images/icons in contemporary twenty-first century settings. This calls for a need to examine the Iconoclastic controversy and the viewpoints that were representative during the eighth century and into the ninth century. However, we need to keep in mind that much of the information that is available on this contentious issue comes from a distinctly one sided perspective as many of the original Iconoclastic writings were destroyed and then subsequently reconstructed by their opposition, the Iconodules.²⁰ The heart of the matter is summarized neatly by Ouspensky:

The image of the God-Man was precisely what the iconoclasts could not understand. They asked how the two natures of Christ could be represented. But the Orthodox (Iconodules) did not even think of representing either the *divine nature* or the *human nature* of Christ. They represented his person, the person of the God-Man who unites in himself the two natures without confusion or division.²¹

¹⁸ Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon, Volume I*. Trans. By Anthony Gythiel and Elizabeth Meyendorff. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 66-70.

¹⁹ Ouspensky, Leonid. *Theology of Icon, Volume I*, 40.

²⁰ "Iconoclastic Struggle Settled, 843." Discovering world History, Gale Research, 1997. Reproduced in Discovering Collection, Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale Group, October, 2001 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/serlet/DC/>; accessed, June 2004.

²¹ Ouspensky, Leonid, *Theology of Icon, Volume I*, 153.

The Iconoclast View

As the Israelites demonstrated by their actions noted in the previous section there is a natural danger with any exploit into using diverse mediums to propagate the truths of God. That danger lies in the transfer of attention and worship onto that medium as opposed to God alone. In part this was the concern of the Iconoclasts, that the use of these icons had led people astray in their worship, perverting it to the point of encouraging idolatry.

The Iconoclasts were not merely looking to eradicate all forms of art and all means of future artistic expression, “it was rather a resistance to one special kind of religious art, namely the icon-painting, an “icon” being a representation of a true historical person, be it our Lord or a saint.”²² With the representation of Christ the problem for the Iconoclasts came in the ability of a finite human to be able to capture both the humanity and the divinity of Christ. In their view, to do so, would be heretical.

Out of the eastern parts of the Roman Empire emerged Emperor Leo III. He was the first ruler of the Isaurian dynasty and the initiator in the rise of iconoclasm. Leo III had been reared under the influence of the heretical beliefs of the Paulicians and rose to power with the on-going threats of Islam. He had achieved moderate success in reforming the economic and political landscape. He next wanted to reform the religious sector and although he had some loose theological basis for confronting the issue of icons, it was not his only motivation.

He also had political reasons for wishing to suppress the veneration of the icons in that he sought to employ the heretical eastern provinces to support the empire, and at the same time he hoped to pacify the Moslem and Jewish elements within the empire. To these reasons was added the disdain he had for Hellenism and Greek culture.²³

²² Georges Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*. (Belmont, Massachusetts: Nordland Publishing Company, 1974), 115.

²³ Metropolitan Joseph Bossakov, “The Iconoclastic Controversy – Historical Perspectives”. *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (Vol. 38., 2001), 216.

The initial act that incited the reaction of the Iconodules was the removal of a statue of Christ from the Imperial palace in 726. That one act started revolts, controversies and theological debate that would last another one hundred years and resonate still today.

In 730 a further decree was made against the veneration of icon. An iconoclastic patriarch was put in place and icons began to be destroyed everywhere.

The icon of the Saviour which had long been above the gate of the imperial palace was removed first and a cross erected in its stead. A plaque with an explanation read: ‘the emperor cannot endure that Christ should be represented as a mute and lifeless form graven on earthly materials. Thus, Leo and his young son, Constantine V, here at the gates engraved the thrice-blessed representation of the cross, the glory of believing monarchs.’ The image of Christ was no longer stamped on the coins of the empire. It was replaced with an imperial personage.²⁴

Whether Leo III was reacting out of fear from the rising Islamic presence and looking to maintain greater control over the empire or whether he thought he had sound theological basis for his actions, we may never know. What we do know in hindsight is that his efforts to diffuse the church and bring under submission served only to ignite a spiritual and theological passion.

The successor to Leo III was even more purposeful and direct in his attack against the use of icons. Constantine V, “... who besides being an able general and administrator, was also an intelligent iconoclast theologian who attempted to construct the dogmatic presuppositions and foundations of iconoclasm...”²⁵

The greatest achievement of Constantine V, in the on-going controversy, came in the form of calling an ecumenical council in 754. This council served to bolster and fuel the iconoclastic movement. However, it was flawed in that there was no papal representation. There

²⁴ Metropolitan Joseph Bossakov, “The Iconoclastic Controversy – Historical Perspectives”. *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (Vol. 38., 2001), 217.

²⁵ Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council*. (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1994), 8.

was also no religious representation from the eastern patriarchs. As a result of those glaring omissions, the decisions of this council were a more aggressive form of persecution of the Iconodules and the confiscation and destruction of the icons.

The persecution of Iconodules, those who venerate the icons and the church leaders continued with intensity until the death of Constantine V. His son and successor to the throne Leo IV was not nearly as intense on the issue as had been his predecessors. Yet, the hostility remained until after his death, when his wife, Irene, convened what is now regarded as the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 for the purpose of working through and bringing to resolution the iconoclastic controversy.²⁶

The Iconodule View

“The Iconodules, by contrast were realists with regard to the visible world. For them matter could provide a channel of communication with the divine; it could offer access to God to the ordinary faithful.”²⁷ To them there is the distinct precedent set by God. For it is God who created the material world in which we live, and He called it all good (Genesis 1). It is also God who became Man, changed his appearance, yet retaining his divinity, in order for created man to have a greater connection with him (John 1). God has also inspired the writing and the preservation of his words in the Bible.²⁸ To the Iconodules all these represented precedence of God using diverse means to relate to his human creation. It was their belief that the icon was a representative of truth, which led people beyond the icon to the holiness of God.²⁹

²⁶ William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology and Worship in Dialogue*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 37.

²⁷ Ibid., Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council*. (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1994), 137.

²⁸ James R. Payton, Jr., “John of Damascus on Human Cognition: An Element in His Apologetic For Icons”, *Church History* (65.02, 2001), 180. [document on-line]; accessed June, 2004.

²⁹ William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology and Worship in Dialogue*, 37.

It was something that expressed deeply held theological convictions, and it was meant to move the viewer to love and serve God. In many respects, an icon was theology in a visual form, and the practice of making an icon in itself represented a spiritual discipline – to be accomplished with much prayer and spiritual preparation.³⁰

Perhaps iconoclasm would never have become such a significant issue except for the unwillingness of the papal office to let it go on without some form of accountability. It may be difficult for us to fathom the heroic efforts of the papal office because of the social and political framework in which we now live. In our modern times we tend toward the freedom of individual choice over a desire to execute our responsibilities of leadership by example, initiative and courage. All of which should be based on the Scriptures.

Following the initial actions of Leo III, Pope Gregory II reacted in the form of written letters challenging the Emperor on his theology, condemning him for his actions and ultimately questioning his authority. “Hearken to us, emperor: abandon your present course and accept the holy church as you found her, for matters of faith and practice concern not the emperor, but the pope, since we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16)”³¹

Pope Gregory II also went on to relate the inconsistency in Emperor Leo III argument against the use of icons.³² The iconoclast position, while it desired to rid the churches of artistic representation, still did not insist on the removal of crosses or discontinuation of the sacraments. This attempt to show these omissions by the iconoclasts were in fact a partial admission of the value in symbolic representation further incited the Emperor against the papal office and the Christian community.³³

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Oliver J. Thatcher & McNeal, Edgar Holmes, *Source Book for Medieval History*. (New York: Scribners, 1905; reprint AMS Press, 1971),

³² Joseph Bossakov, *The Iconoclastic Controversy – Historical Perspectives*. The Greek Orthodox Theological Review, (1993, 38/1-4), 218.

³³ Ibid., 220-222.

Despite the attack on religious images that had begun by Emperor Leo III, St. John of Damascus was able to prepare a defense of the usage and viability of icons and imagery within the church context. Incredibly, St. John lived outside of the Emperor's control, in Damascus, which had been under Islamic rule for many years. Although Christians were generally persecuted or forced to renounce their faith under the Islamic governments, St. John and his predecessors had found favour with the ruling authorities and were allowed to live without the threat of violence.³⁴ This provided him the perfect refuge from which to develop the theological arguments that would provide the major thrust of the Iconodule counter attack.

“I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. I will not cease from honouring that matter which works my salvation. I venerate it, though not as God... Was not the sacred and holy mountain of Calvary matter? What of the life-giving rock, the Holy Sepulchre, the source of our resurrection: was it not matter? Is not the most holy book of the Gospels matter? Is not the blessed table matter which gives us the Bread of Life?... And before all these things, is not the body and blood of our Lord matter? Either do away with the veneration and worship due to all these things, or submit to the tradition of the Church in the worship of images, honouring God and his friends, and following in this the grace of the Holy Spirit.”³⁵

The Decision of the Council

With equal opportunity for argument and support, the Iconodules, led by St. John of Damascus were able to efficiently refute each position that the iconoclasts brought forward. The decisions of the council brought about this conclusion: “The icon is to be venerated and honoured, but not worshiped. Worship is reserved to him who is the subject of the faith: God

³⁴ Ibid, 216.

³⁵ Mary H. Allies, *On Holy Images*, trans. St. John Damascene. (Thomas Baker, 1898), 10-17.

alone. There is nothing inherent in the wood or stone which is honored. It is rather the person represented who is revered through the image represented.”³⁶

With this victory many believed that peace would return. Additionally, it was hoped that this peace would bring about a renewed desire to reclaim the role of the icons within the Church without fear of persecution. However, peace did not last long. Despite these resolutions from the Ecumenical council in Nicea, the iconoclastic movement remained in motion and again gathered enough momentum. In 815, shortly after Leo V of Armenia became emperor conflict with the church again flared up. This time however it lacked the intensity of the previous unrest and was brought to a final end in 843 after Empress Theodora had ascended to the throne. Theodora convened a church council whereby the veneration of icons was once again upheld and the excommunication of the iconoclasts was decreed.³⁷

Although the theological writing and testimony of St. John of Damascus was already seventy years old. Others had come along and deepened their knowledge in the theological implications of his writing. It is on the strength of those arguments from the Seventh Ecumenical Council that the veneration of icons was upheld at this last council in 843.

The Immediate Implications of the Council Decision

It is possible, that there might have been those who could have lost heart when the Iconoclasts began once again to make themselves known. From our current perspective, we can look back and recognize the value of purposefully working out theological positions in all areas

³⁶ Metropolitan Joseph Bossakov, “The Iconoclastic Controversy – Historical Perspectives”. *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (Vol. 38., 2001), 219.

³⁷ *Iconoclastic Struggle Settled, 843*. DISCovering World History. Gale Research, 1997. Reproduced in Discovering Collection. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale Group. October, 2001. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/DC>

of life, not just this one mentioned. As we allow the truth to permeate our lives, the lives of others will also be affected and give rise to a greater unity in the proclamation of biblical truth. We can see that lived out from the end of the eighth century and into the early ninth century. The work that had been begun was able to carry the Iconodule cause to victory not just once, but twice. Perhaps not as quickly as they may have wanted, but it was used by God to keep them attentive and vigilant at defending their faith in the hostility of that environment.

Eleven hundred years ago, people loss their lives, were moved from their homes and forced out of their churches. It seems trite to say that all of this happened simply because of differing opinions on art. Yet when any subject starts to disturb what we have come to believe about God, then to our collective Christian shame, we can react in negative and harmful ways. Despite all the differing opinions, it is interesting to note how the Lord used this controversy to sharpen the faith of two or three generations.

While loss of life is always tragic, the loss of many of the artifacts from the Byzantine Empire and in particular those that pertain to this time period leave us with great speculation as to what we have missed. The evidence that remains serves to remind us that though the road to a personal relationship with God through Christ is narrow, the witness to that awesome truth is diverse. It is this diversity that caused concern during the eighth and ninth century and caused a sharpening of theology with regard to their use.³⁸

The decision of this council confers that the answer is not the abolition of images but the importance of sufficient instruction in defining and facilitating their veneration, that others may encounter Goxd through them rather than fall into worshipping the created image.³⁹

³⁸ Ouspensky, Leonid, *Theology of Image, Volume I*, 137.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

As God has created a world, incarnated his Son as an example, and left us the scriptures to instruct; we too, by virtue of being made in his image, have the capacity to likewise create for his glory. It is left for us to celebrate those creative attributes by glorifying the One who lavished it upon us. We can therefore facilitate, for others, a greater and a wider reaching sense of worshiping God. “The answer given by the Seventh Ecumenical Council is that material things filled with uncreated grace – the Eucharist, relics, saints and the icons – can raise those who are worthy, the uneducated along with the learned, to intimacy with God.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council*, 137.

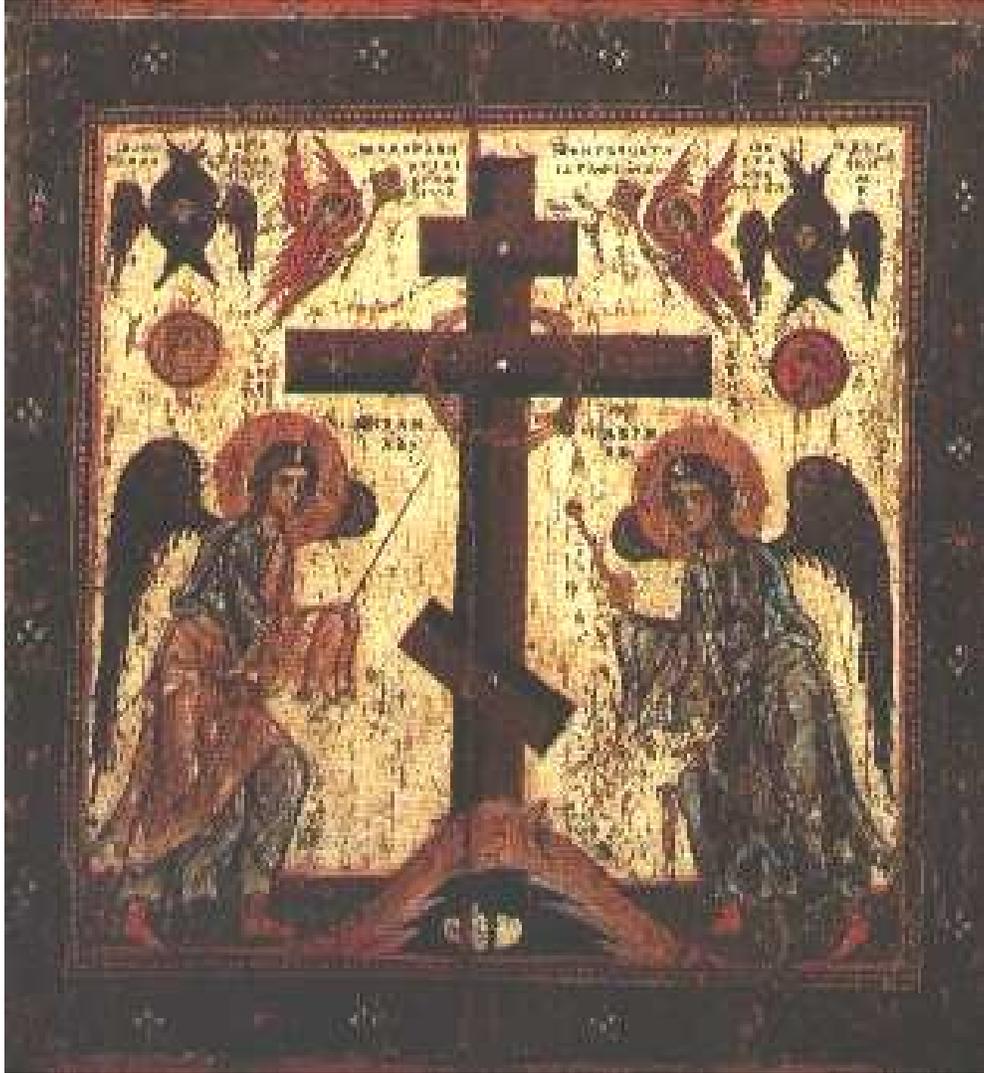
A Visual Perspective of Icons



Christ Pantocrator, 11th c. Saint Sophia, Kiev.

“A fiery look, a powerful neck, the long hair imitating the Nazarites consecrated to God; the rugged face of the Saviour.... Within the halo that encircles his head is a cross whose three upper arms carry the three letters “omicron, omega, nu,” i.e., “He who is.” The Word of God in Exodus 3:14 defines the Saviour: the icon represents the hypostasis, the two natures mysteriously united into one person.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Mahmoud Zibawi, *The Icon: Its Meaning and History*. (Collegville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 21-23.



The Adoration of the Cross, 12th c.

“...the cross is decorated with a crown of thorns and the angels hold the reed and the lance, symbols of Christ’s passion. The cross rises above the dark cave with Adam’s skull. The sun and moon are seen at either end of the cross’s arms; two cherubim and two seraphim are shown in the upper part...”⁴²

⁴² Viktor Nikitich Lazarev, *The Russian Icon: From Its Origins to the Sixteenth Century*. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 363.



The Great Humiliation, 18th c. (on a tabernacle door)

“...a mystical sadness; with his head bowed, his hands wounded, Christ lets us see the blood running from his pierced side”⁴³ into a cup of suffering. The placement on the tabernacle door would serve as a sober reminder of his sufferings to those who enter in.

⁴³ Mahmoud Zibawi, *The Icon: Its Meaning and History*, 112.



Saint John in Silence, 17th c.

“Holding his Gospel half open, St. John the Theologian places his hand to his lips in a sign of silence and humility: the word spoken by his Gospel is not his own, but that of God whose instrument he is. To the right, an angel breathes the voice of God into his ear, but his lips remain closed: God’s communication remains beyond words and saying...this icon expresses the secret of the expression of the pursed lips, taken endlessly by the great iconographers of all times.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Mahmoud Zibawi, *The Icon: Its Meaning and History*, 40.

The Reformation Impact

The role of the Seventh Ecumenical Council was to bring the iconoclastic controversy to a final decision that would allow believers in Christ to have a common understanding about the limits of their worship practices. What was needed beyond that was a leader to further the application of the decision in the tumultuous socio-political decades that would come.

St. Photius filled just that role. Following in the courageous footsteps of his martyred father, Photius defended and perpetuated the use of icon in conjunction with his strong theological and philosophical training.⁴⁵ Leonid Ouspensky details the importance of both the individual, his contribution toward the advancement of venerating the icon and his commitment to the Scriptures at this crucial, post-Iconoclastic, juncture:

“Like the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, he (St. Photius) saw in the icon an analogy with Holy Scripture, an idea he further clarified and developed. He drew attention to the primacy of seeing over hearing (a primacy emphasized in patristic writings), and he was emphatic about the importance of teaching through the icon. The one who refuses it has already refused instruction by the Holy Scriptures. To venerate icons means to understand Holy Scripture correctly, and vice versa.”⁴⁶

With the commitment and resolve of Photius to uphold the clear teaching of Scripture over and above the political and papal self-serving interpretations, the use of image/icon was pressed forward into the middle ages. In so doing, a continued effort to facilitate interpretation of the visual was required and very much recommended. The *Legenda Aurea*⁴⁷ (Golden Legend)

⁴⁵ “St. Photius the Patriarch of Constantinople”, [document on-line]; available from <http://www.ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsLife.asp?FSID=100442>.

⁴⁶ Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of Icon, Vol. II*, (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1992), 211.

⁴⁷ Paul Halsall, “The Golden Legend (Aurea Legenda)”. [document on-line]; part of *The Internet Medieval Source Book*; available from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/goldenlegend/>. Scanned from *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints*. Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 1275. First Edition Published 1470. Englished by William Caxton, First Edition 1483, Edited by F.S. Ellis, Temple Classics, 1900 (Reprinted 1922, 1931.)

used in conjunction with the Scriptures provided vital information to explain the many sculptures and paintings that had made their way into the life of churches by the 1200's.⁴⁸ "Images open the heart and awake the intellect, and, in a marvelous and indescribable manner, engage us to imitate the persons they represent."⁴⁹

The desire to communicate truth through the use of image/icon, in middle-age thought was specifically looked to convey the heart of theological truth in simple forms in order to deepen the understanding and faith of many, even those who weren't given to literary pursuits.⁵⁰ Looking backward in time is difficult because we often make our assessment on the superficial evidence restricted to the visual representations alone. We lack the immediate contextual understanding in which these images/icons came to be present in their places of worship. For that reason, perhaps we need to have even more explanation given to us in order to understand what we see when we look backwards in time through current replications which exist mostly out of original context.⁵¹

In Favour Of Icon

It is important to be reminded of context and the intention of those we now label artists and sculptors. Their work was not about art, it was about making the gospel accessible to a wider range of people.⁵² "Assisted by such material objects, by statues, images, and scenic games, the most feeble intelligence might rise to the conception of truth, and a soul plunged in the lowest

⁴⁸ Alphonse Napoleon Didron. *Christian Iconography: The History of Art in the Middle Ages*. (NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co,1965), 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁵¹ John Drury, *Painting the Word: Christian Pictures and Their Meanings*. (London: Yale University Press, 1999), xi.

⁵² Elizabeth Bruening-Lewis. *The Power of Sacred Images*. (Allen, TX: Christian Classics (A division of Thomas More), 1997), 108.

abyss of darkness might soar upwards in the light displayed by art before its eyes.”⁵³ Which is the essence of veneration.

As the Reformation age began to leave its mark on the historical landscape, the role of the iconographer (as creator of image/icon) was revealed to a greater degree. To be involved in the making of icon meant a strict adherence to methods⁵⁴ and having the theological soundness of their lives placed under the scrutiny of the appointed clergy.⁵⁵

Andrei Rublev was one such contributor whose life was summed up in this manner by Victor Nikitich Lazarev in his historical documentation of the Russian icon. “This is all we know of this glorious master’s life. Later sources mention Rublev as an excellent iconographer, a man of extraordinary intelligence and with a broad experience of life, also stressing at the same time his profound monastic humility.”⁵⁶ This humility is demonstrated by the fact that Rublev, like other iconographers did not sign or authenticate their works with any personal identification. They preferred not to detract from the spiritual encounter that they knew God was asking them to render.⁵⁷

The iconographer submitted to these parameters willingly because of the calling that drew them to their divinely appointed task. Their goal was to rest in the knowledge that “the icon sanctifies the place where it is located and creates for the faithful a tangible sense of the Divine Presence. It is most certainly an “encounter,” because to pray before an icon of Christ is to pray in his presence.”⁵⁸

⁵³ Alphonse Napoleon Didron, *Christian Iconography: The History of Art in the Middle Ages*, 7.

⁵⁴ Michel Quenot. *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991), 68.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Viktor Nikitich Lazarev. *The Russian Icon: From Its Origins to the Sixteenth Century*. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 91.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Michel Quenot. *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom*, 155.

Martin Luther was a major leader in the changes brought about in the Reformation to the traditional orthodoxy that had corrupted the church. Although he was not overtly enthusiastic regarding his personal position on the use of icon, he was unable to deny its potential to be used effectively to draw upon the soul of the seeking heart. To Luther, “if it is not sin to have the image of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes?”⁵⁹

Therefore from Luther’s perspective, the images ought to remain as a means to worshiping God, but it would be the responsibility of the clergy by example and teaching to preach and instruct against their wrongful use.⁶⁰

“This means to instruct and enlighten the conscience that it is idolatry to worship them, or to trust in them, since one is to trust alone in Christ...And they are not only to be tolerated, but for the sake of memorial and the witness they are praiseworthy and honourable, as the witness stones of Joshua (Josh. 24:26) and of Samuel (1 Sam 7:12).”⁶¹

Against the Use of Icon

One of the major strengths of the Reformation was the development of the printing press and the subsequent saturation and accessibility of the print medium, to which the Bible was no exception.⁶² Now in the hands of the people as well as the clergy, to some the pathway to God became clear and negated the use of any additional media, including images and icons. The Reformation “gave birth to the particular challenges and tensions that characterize the modern world – especially in regard to Christians and their relationship to the arts.”⁶³ Among those who strongly opposed the use of image/icon were Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin.

⁵⁹ Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen (Editor). *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*. (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing Co.), 2004, 134.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁶² William Richey Hogg., “[The Scriptures in the Christian world mission : three historical considerations.](#)” *Missiology*, (12 O 1984): 399.

⁶³ William Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 51.

Zwingli was extreme in his refuting of the use of images/icons. From his perspective the Scripture was all that was sufficient to provide instruction and facilitate practice of the Christian faith.⁶⁴ While he acknowledged the difference between adoration and veneration, for Zwingli, any amount of honour given to an object or representation was in violation to his interpretation of Scripture. “If one has them in a church then one has already given the images honour.”⁶⁵ (ironically, he was giving that honour to the printed representation of the Scriptures) Therefore, Zwingli, recognizes the actions associated with veneration as a violation of God’s commands that becomes an imitation of pagan religious practice.⁶⁶ Though opposing in his view to that of Luther, he also uses the response of the heart as the proof for his position: “Therefore it must always follow that we also must learn that faith is necessary in our hearts if we want to do anything pleasing to God. This we cannot learn from walls but only from the gracious puling of God out of his own word.”⁶⁷

While Zwingli was very firm in his stance against the icon, John Calvin was adamant that it not be tolerated to any extent. For Calvin, “the only images allowed are those that picture visible objects, but only in the context of teaching or for pleasure.”⁶⁸ The semblance to the pagan rituals and worship were too close for Calvin to be able to recognize any validity in the use of images. His position was enhanced by the strength of the language that he used to make certain there was no confusing how we felt about the matter.

“Meanwhile, since this brute stupidity gripped the whole world – to pant after visible figures of God, and thus to form gods of wood, stone, gold, silver or other dead and corruptible matter – we must cling to this principle: God’s glory is corrupted by an impious falsehood whenever any form is attached to him.”⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen (Editor). *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader.*, 134.

⁶⁵ Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen (Editor). *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*, 135.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 136.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen (Editor). *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*, 137.

Contribution to the Discussion

While Luther was permissive with respect to icons, he was not an outspoken advocate for their use. Both he and those who sharply rejected the use of image/icon held strongly to a high place of the Scriptures. They seemed to view the use of image/icon as a threat likened to pagan ritual that had no place in Christian practice. Was it deep theological convictions that led the intense resistance of many Reformers to the use of image/icon? Or was it a great fascination with their new accessibility to the printed Holy Scriptures? What we can know with certainty is that their high view of the printed word was the driving force behind their resistance to image/icon.

We currently live under the ramifications of many of the freedoms of religious practice that the Reformation battles won for us, including the honour we place on the printed word. In fact many of our modern church, like many post-reformation churches, have been voided of images/icons, except for the occasional and ceremonial use of symbols, including words. “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.”⁷⁰

It is this mystery of the engagement of the soul and mind to which Ouspensky continually returns, acknowledging the divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture but recognizing the finite limitations that humanity has of deriving perfect understanding. He says, that any “theological doctrine which pretends to be a perfect explanation of the revealed mystery will inevitably appear to be false: by the very fact of pretending to the fullness of knowledge it will set itself in opposition to the fullness, in which the Truth is known in part.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Dale Dirksen, *ICONS FOR EVANGELICALS: THE THEOLOGY AND USE OF ICONS IN ORTHODOX CHURCHES AND POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS FOR THE USE OF SYMBOL IN CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL CHURCHES*. [document on-line] available from www.ccws.ca, 48.

⁷¹ Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky. *The Meaning of Icons*. Trans. By G. E. H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1989), 19.

The Reformation managed to renew the Christian faith and practice with many benefits and freedoms as it sought to distance itself from Eastern Orthodoxy. One of those areas was the use of image/icon in Christian practice. Was this an area of benefit or has it been a loss to the majority of our western practices? The immediate consequences led to a dimming of the use of icon, even in the east and the rise to artistic expression through the Enlightenment. A growing separation between art, artists and the Church would ensue in the years to come, certainly affecting western practice but having its influence in eastern orthodoxy as well.⁷²

⁷² Mahmoud Zibawi, *The Icon: Its Meaning and History*. (Collegville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 142-149.

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT SITUATION

Multimedia Projection and Today's Icon

The Use of Image in Today's World

Technology and its continual transformations have affected the majority of our activities and have infiltrated the intricate details of our daily lives.⁷³ To deny its influence, particularly in our western culture, would be a concession to ignorance.

The definition of the word (technology), just as its influence, has undergone changes over the course of time. It has moved from being considered as an object to being regarded as a medium that engages and affects all areas of life.⁷⁴

It is not that there has been a change in the information that we consider. Technology has altered the meanings that we attach to what we receive. There is a fine line in the balancing of these aspects to be sure, but grasping the distinction is significant. "A condition of simulation increasingly becomes the new reality as the sign begins to replace rather than simply to substitute for the real thing that it is to represent...In this condition, persons see the simulated as real."⁷⁵

Technology has also accelerated the pace with which we receive information. In the 1960's Marshall McLuhan captured the potential for transformation that exists because of technology. He likens it to the impact of the railway and how it "accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work

⁷³ Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 94.

⁷⁴ John Naisbitt, *High Tech, High Touch: Technology and Our Search for Meaning*, (New York, NY: Random House Inc., 1999), 24.

⁷⁵ Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 39.

and leisure.”⁷⁶ The decades that have followed have provided the evidence to support McLuhan’s conclusions. We have repeatedly witnessed technological advancements transferred from exclusive professional use to infiltrate the everyday functions of our lives.

There is an aura of magic when a new and still more effortless and sparkling form of transportation, communication, or entertainment becomes available. It is magic that must be paid for, of course, through labor. That bargain is well understood and accepted if not highly valued.⁷⁷

Technology has positioned itself as the answer to our most pressing questions regarding the usage of time. Neil Postman presents ‘time’ as an enemy that technology has vanquished.⁷⁸ It may be more that time is a captive that has been enslaved. Technology has made it possible to, in effect multiply time through the simultaneous enablement of multiple tasks. What used to take hours or days can now be done in seconds and minutes. The promise of greater productivity and efficiency has helped to increase our need for and our enhancement of technology. “The thrust of a century of scholarship had the effect of making us lose confidence in our belief systems and therefore ourselves. Amid the conceptual debris, there remained one sure thing to believe in – technology.”⁷⁹ The rapidity of technological improvements, the seemingly endless stream of devices has changed us from being satisfied with increased efficiency, to wanting it and expecting it to an even greater degree (i.e. the rapid changes to the function of cell phones). For the majority of our western culture Postman’s theory has become reality.

Projection technology has certainly changed over the course of the last 100 years. Part of that change is the increasing domination that projection technology holds over the print media in their quest to influence lives and transfer information through images. “In an instant it presents a

⁷⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1964), 8.

⁷⁷ Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*, 86.

⁷⁸ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 45.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

scene of landscape with figures that would require several pages of prose to describe. In the next instant it repeats, and can go on repeating, this detailed information.”⁸⁰ Projection technology has morphed from motion pictures, shown to large groups in theatres, to televised programming made for small gatherings (families) in our homes to the personal, portable mediums available in today’s market. All of which, can now be intermixed and delivered as needed.⁸¹ Technology is not a static object. It is a means of communication that embodies the content it transfers. The difference is that through these means, the speed and forms of information that we are made to contend with are rapidly changing.

In the early nineties, Neil Postman estimated that the average American, by the time they reached their golden years would be under the influence of two million television commercials in addition to the messages they received via other media (print, radio, etc.).⁸² Undoubtedly these estimates could be dramatically enhanced if we were to accurately gauge the diverse growth of media and our media consumption. Based on current trends (US stats: 9.6 hours per day per person)⁸³ of television, computers, radio, movies, music and print, these numbers would be greatly increased. “In putting it this way, I mean to say that mass advertising is not the cause of the great symbol drain. Such cultural abuse could not have occurred without technologies to make it possible and a world-view to make it desirable.”⁸⁴ The use of image, through various means of projection and print technology permeates all of facets of life and culture.

Each development of the electric age attracts, and demands a high degree of producer-orientation...for in radio and TV- purely electric forms from which the mechanical principle has been excluded – there is an altogether new relation of the medium to its

⁸⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1964), 288.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸² Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, 170.

⁸³ Rachel Abramowitz, “Media Glut Meltdown”, *Edmonton Journal*, Jan. 28, 2007, E3.

⁸⁴ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, 171.

users. This is a relation of high participation and involvement that, for good or ill, no mechanism had ever evoked.⁸⁵

The potential for those who use technology to engage and influence the thinking of others is its greatest attraction and its greatest danger. Technology, in itself does not possess the capacity to differentiate its use. It remains open to being manipulated by the sender and being defined by those who receive its message. The potential to connect with and influence those who receive the messages sent is what makes the use of projection technology appealing.⁸⁶ The growth in the volume of messages and the growth in the diversity of communication, and their influence, through images and messages, provide the evidence. “It (television) is a primary source of orientation to the social, political, and economic spheres of experience. Although television may have its greatest impact on those who rely on it as a primary source of news and entertainment, its environment of symbols surrounds us all.”⁸⁷ This quote represented George Goethals view of the impact of the visual media in the 1980s. What people saw on their screens was altering the way in which they viewed the world around them. Their everyday life was related back to what they had seen on the screen.

The evidence from our television culture demonstrates the potential of the projected image to influence the way in which people think about themselves and others. A recent news article about some of the tactics used by the Japanese government underscores this point. They are “sending animation or cartoon artists abroad as cultural ambassadors, and the government has named a panel of executives to advise ways to market Japanese animation and culture to foreign audiences....warm feelings for Japanese animation can translate into for Japanese foreign

⁸⁵ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 194-5.

⁸⁶ Jean Cover, “[Theological reflections : social effects of television](#)”. *Religious Education*, (78 Winter 1983): 46.

⁸⁷ George T. Goethals, *The TV Ritual: Worship at the Video Altar* (Boston, MA.: Beacon Press, 1981), 142.

policy.”⁸⁸ The projection of images through technology is done in order to influence our thinking and to draw us to make decisions. No longer limited to commercial or entertainment areas, projection technology is now a function of the decision-making process and not just a marketing tool. It is a vibrant and viable means of communication that has made its presence felt in all areas of our lives.

Impact of Technology in Today’s World

Enough studies have been done to tell us about the wonderful educational benefits of technology, both as instructional tools in the educational process and as a subject of our education. There have been equally enough studies remarking the dangers of media, influencing negative behaviour and shortening our attention span. The American Academy of Pediatrics revealed the following comments regarding the influence of media and technology:

Media influence on children has steadily increased as new and more sophisticated types of media have been developed and made available to the American public. Availability, as well as greater affordability for American families, has provided easier access to media for children. Beneficial effects include early readiness for learning, educational enrichment, opportunities to view or participate in discussions of social issues, exposure to the arts through music and performance, and entertainment. Harmful effects may result from sensationalization of violent behavior, exposure to subtle or explicit sexual content, promotion of unrealistic body images, presentation of poor health habits as desirable practices, and exposure to persuasive advertising targeting children.⁸⁹

What we can conclude from the proliferation of these reports⁹⁰ is that technology particularly visual technology has made and continues to make an impact on our society.

⁸⁸ “The Power of Cartoons”. *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, March 13, 2007, B8.

⁸⁹ Laura Blackwell Clark, *Media Influence on Children*, <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2212/Media-Influence-on-Children.html>; [document on-line] accessed March 2007.

⁹⁰ The internet website www.allcountries.org carries census information from many different countries in the world. A check through these studies has revealed a significant increase in electronic media and computer usage of the last ten to twelve years.

For the last two centuries industrialization has been preparing the way for it, but it is only in the last thirty years that technology has begun to impose itself everywhere, to change everything, to take over all social activities and forms, and to become a true environment. Now a true environment has the following features: it enables us to live, it sets us in danger, it is immediate to us, and it mediates all else. Technology fully meets this description.⁹¹

The challenge now, more than ever, is to figure out a way to handle the constant barrage of images and messages that we receive through media. This is true if we are watching television with others, surfing the internet alone or taking in a presentation. Technology is not neutral, but it embodies the intentions and motivations of its messenger in the images and messages it sends.

Those who receive the message are faced with a choice. The question for the receiver is ‘how to handle it all?’ McLuhan challenges us to learn how to “ride with the punch” instead of “taking it on the chin.”⁹² Denying the influence of the media is not a way out. The evidence suggests that we can be overcome by it or learn to navigate our way through it.⁹³

Accepting the challenge to meet the onslaught of images and messages we receive means having the capacity to retain meaning in those tenets of life that fuel us for living. One of the effects of media saturation is a lack of meaning or loyalty to the things and even the ideas we hold. Postman contends that meaning is stripped away by the over-saturation that is a byproduct of our mass communication era.

“...the trivialization of significant cultural symbols is largely conducted by commercial enterprise. This occurs not because corporate America is greedy but because the adoration of technology pre-empts the adoration of anything else. Symbols that draw their meaning from traditional religious or national contexts must therefore be made impotent as quickly as possible – that is, drained of sacred or even serious connotations.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm Eerdmans Co., 1989), 133.

⁹² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 66.

⁹³ Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*, 82

⁹⁴ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, 165.

The speed and intensity with which technology is developing places a significant impetus on people to be equipped to discern and engage the rapidly evolving messages that we receive at the same pace or risk being swept into its current.⁹⁵

Another very significant impact that technology has had is based on the distance it has created in our human relationships. In our everyday functions it is largely considered that we can produce “more” by being less personally connected with others. This is accomplished by phones, emails and text messages. We converge on websites to exchange our information and establish internet domains to gather people to discuss topics of like interests. Yet, despite all of the aforementioned production, we remain physically distant and sometimes even being anonymous to one another.

We feel a vague but profound yearning to escape from high-tech time. Without knowing it, we are seeking the relief of high-touch time. Without a conscious awareness of the pervasiveness of consumer technology and the impact it has on our lives, it becomes impossible to escape. Technology is the air we breathe, so we can't leave it behind without extraordinary effort and reflection. We remain tethered to work, to home, to media, and to all the electronic technologies that promise progress but in fact ensure distance and distraction. Like a dog chasing its tail, it is a never-ending cycle and a little ridiculous.⁹⁶

The pervasiveness with which images are being used to challenge and potentially manipulate thinking has deepened the impact on our current society. The dramatic pace at which this technology is changing and the increase in the diversity by which we receive the messages through the medium of projection technology underscores the importance for gaining understanding of how to deal with it effectively. It has moved from occupying a portion of our lives, to permeating all facets of life and therefore calls for an intentional response.

⁹⁵ Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe*, 138.

⁹⁶ John Naisbitt, *High Tech, High Touch: Technology and Our Search for Meaning*, 64

Current Practices in the Church

The Influence of the Puritan Movement

The evidence of technology's influence upon many levels of our society is very obvious, and the institutional evangelical church has rarely been far behind in making use of those advancements. The printing press, as noted earlier, provided the means and the momentum for Reformation thought to have its impact on our congregational practices across many parts of the globe. "The Reformation supplanted a visual with an aural culture, and the Church has been responding verbally and logically to verbal and logical attacks upon its claims."⁹⁷ The bond between the inspirational works of the iconographer and their role in the liturgical rhythm of the Church was broken. "In the West, the theologian has instructed and even limited the artist, whereas in the East an iconographer is a charismatic who contemplates the liturgical mysteries and instructs the theologian."⁹⁸ Creative visual art began to take on its own life outside of the church, particularly in the west. While inside the Protestant church liturgy centred around the Scriptures and apart from the icons, images or art.⁹⁹

The Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) was created by reformers in order to preserve the objectivity of worship and protect it from the evils of excess and anarchy.¹⁰⁰ Part of the key principles within this document and others that it inspired were specific regulations concerning the prohibition of visual representations in the worship setting. Note the following

⁹⁷ Walker, Keith. *Images or Idols?: The Place of Sacred Art in Churches Today*. (The Canterbury Press, Norwich. 1996), 99.

⁹⁸ Calian, Carnegie S., *Icon And Pulpit: The Protestant-Orthodox Encounter*, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968), 140.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁰⁰ William Young. "The Puritan Principle of Worship.", *The Puritan Regulative Principle of the Church* (Originally published as a series in Blue Banner Faith and Life, vol 14, no. 2, April-June 1959 through Vol. 16, no. 1, January-March 1961) [document on-line]

<http://www.apuritansmind.com/PuritanWorship/YoungWilliamPuritanRegulativePrinciple.htm;Internet>; accessed 14 March 2007.

instructions by William Ames, Professor at Franeker in his work *Medulla Theologica* (Eng. Trans., *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, London, 1642):

All such like meanes ordained of God are declared in the second Commandement, by forbidding all contrary meanes of worship devised by men, under the title of Graven and Image: Which seeing they were of old the chiefe inventions of men corrupting the worship of God, they are most fitly (by a Synechdoche frequent in the Decalogue) put instead of all devises of man's wit pertaining to worship. No worship of this kind is lawful!, unlesse it hath God for the Author, and ordainer of it. Deut. 4:2 and 12:32; I Chron. 16:13.¹⁰¹

What the Puritan developments did not consider is that in their desire to seek protection from the images, they were, perhaps unknowingly, creating a worship of the printed word in its place. Words, in print and through the careful orchestration of vocabulary could be used to direct people to responses that had nothing to do with God.¹⁰² We have seen the lingering influence of this through the rise of fundamentalism in the early 20th century and the emotional frenzies created by revival preaching designed to elicit instantaneous responses at the cue of the preacher.

Another by-product of this emphasis on words saw a change in the culture of communicating and learning about God. More than needing to attend a service or mass to hear a sermon, curriculum was developed that required more applied learning centred on the printed word.¹⁰³ We continue to see the effects of this into our current times.

It is true, that as part of this emphasis on education we have made allowance for the use of images. They are almost exclusively reserved for the teaching with our children (pictures, flannel graphs). No one would deny the importance of having the children connect the cut-outs to reality of the scriptural accounts they are learning. However, there seems to be an inherent idea that one of the marks of spiritual maturity is to learn without the use of visual aid.

¹⁰¹ William Young, "The Puritan Principle of Worship."

¹⁰² Calian, Carnegie S., *Icon And Pulpit: The Protestant-Orthodox Encounter*, 135.

¹⁰³ Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication*, (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 28.

“It [(technology)] represents a culture that is not considered equal to the scientific and literary culture. It is not another aspect of culture itself, but is only a subculture. And as for the message of faith, if it is not presented in terms of doctrine but in terms of life and modulation, it becomes a submessage.”¹⁰⁴

Despite the fact that we increasingly accept technological intrusion and innovation into many areas of our life there seems to be a hesitation to bring our theological and technological spheres together. Whether intentional or not the message conveyed by the lingering impact of reformation thought, carried on by Puritan expansion to the West, is that the potential to learn through the use of image is not as intellectually sophisticated as the emphasis on doctrine. Historically, the two have been held in opposition to one another.

The advancing years of modernity with its emphasis on the rise of scientific thought and its application in the area of technological advancement has served to strip away some of the refinement of the puritan influence. As a culture, for the most part, we have come to equate faster with better and we embrace the new technology as more efficient even over that which is proven reliable. As a result we live in constant tension, not simply trying to live, but trying to do so while searching for the next technological advancement to solve our problems of daily living.¹⁰⁵ (As I write this a lady has come by office looking for a lost pair glasses. It isn't the first time that has happened to her. She wonders to me, about the possibility of implanting a device in the arm of her glasses that would beep when she pressed a button on a transmitter. That way she could find them when they are misplaced). Change becomes a constant, especially in the area of technology.

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication*, 204.

¹⁰⁵ Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 29-30.

A Brief Local History

The local church family that I belong to meets together every Sunday in a brown brick building that built in the late 1970's. The blueprint for this building must have been common, as I have recognized its features in other church buildings that I have been in that were built around the same time. I have been a part of this congregation for about eight years.

Great care has been taken over the years, and continues on to this present day, to maintain the attractiveness and cleanliness of the building, including the sanctuary (see photo on next page). The sanctuary is used exclusively for Sunday services and other congregational gatherings. The side walls are white. The platform area was originally designed with the pulpit as its focal point. The original design is void of any symbolic representation in its architecture and certainly void of any representational images/icons. Or is it?

Much like the reformation-protestant-puritan-fundamentalist heritage from which it was birthed there is an unmistakable emphasis on the Bible and its teaching. The prominence of the large wooden pulpit is revered by many of the seniors as a sign of God's authority being represented by the words that come from behind it. A large 'family' Bible sits prominently in front of the pulpit. To my knowledge it has never been used for anything other than another reminder that the Holy Scriptures are preached here. (It is interesting to note that there are some pictures interspersed in that Bible, that relate to various scriptural stories.) The table that it sits on is the communion table. It is inscribed with the words "DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME." This is supposed to serve as a reminder to those who come about the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ.



(Sanctuary: constructed in 1979)

Not much has changed in the almost thirty years since this sanctuary has been built. The walls on the side of the platform have been drywalled and painted white. The platform itself has all been raised to be one level surface. There is a wooden cross that hangs where the curtains were (however they are often covered by a screen). The communion table and Family Bible sit at the front of the platform, on the floor. The large pulpit has been removed (stored not destroyed) replaced by a portable single stem podium.

These objects are all considered, at best, symbols to remind us of the prominence that God's Truth and therefore the priority that God should have in our lives. Many of our congregants come from Calvinistic backgrounds or other conservative evangelical traditions. Others who have become a part of this church family as a result of their faith in Christ have

rarely seen or known anything different in terms image, icon or symbol in a sanctuary. For the majority of these people, understanding veneration would be difficult given their fearful predisposition toward considering a representative image as idolatrous merely by its physical presence. Would they, unlike the puritans and fundamentalists before them, recognize their pulpit, tables, big Bibles, and even their sanctuaries as idols which are given to worship?

In the last two years this church has begun to use a computer and video projection unit as a regular function in the Sunday services. Primarily these technological devices have been used to display wording related to announcements, song lyrics, verses of Scripture and the sermon notes. Although the bulletins have been prepared by a computer in the offices for years, this is the first time that we have used computers and projection technology in the services. How we continue to advance its use must be considered carefully with a purpose to allow people to examine their traditions and preferences against the essentials of worship: encountering God.

Technological changes have been made in this church before (organ vs. piano; voice vs. microphone; hymnal vs. overhead projector), it has just been a long while since they have been considered. This time it feels different and that's probably because of the inherent risks that come with the potential benefits of harnessing projection technology for the purpose of providing a means for people to worship God.

A Theology of Image (using Projection Technology) for Today's Church

The Dangers of Image for Today's Church

Almost daily, sometimes through the postal service, but mostly through e-mail, there is an offer to try, buy and use pictures and videos for the purpose of enhancing church services. This is undoubtedly a reflection of the times in which we live. It's a visual age and the use of projection technology is infiltrating our churches in increasing measure. The use of this technology ranges from basic information (like our church mentioned above), to elaborate in-house production departments. The result has been a move to have church staffs (in large churches that can afford it) include 'technical arts' pastors in addition to 'worship arts' pastors.

A complete abandonment to the use of image/icon is not the prescription for our worship ills. A prevalent danger is to abuse the capacity to use the equipment we have, assuming that because it is current it will be more effective. It's a battle that we need to fight within our own desires and one that is not new to the visual age we live in. It seems that nearly every innovation is heralded as the answer to expanding God's Kingdom, particularly in the West.¹⁰⁶ If our focus is on the medium itself as a solution then, in this current culture, we have missed the mark and slid towards making idols out of our projectors, as we have done in with our books with coming of the printing press.

Another pitfall that we need to be careful in the embrace of projection technology is our capacity to use it to convey relevance with little regard for content, but solely for the sake of evoking an emotional response in those who are gathered. "When pleasure is only the consequence of a physical impulse, it may be violent and it will not fulfill a person's being. It

¹⁰⁶ David Noble. *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and The Spirit of Invention*. (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 94.

will be a blow, not a revelation.”¹⁰⁷ We must resist the urge to be spectacular in the moment. Having a goal to evoke emotion¹⁰⁸ can leave open the potential to exchange authentic artistic representations for superficial generic (but nice) mass appeal images and videos. The danger of relevant and spectacular must continually be guarded. When the use of projection technology becomes an end in itself and relegates former accepted practices solely because they are not new, then idolatry has occurred.

There also exists the risk in trying to shape God according to our technology rather than allowing God the freedom to shape us through a liturgy that is inclusive of projection technology. In an ecclesiastical culture that equates large numbers with success, this perspective poses a significant challenge. “A preacher who confines himself to considering how a medium can increase his audience will miss the significant question: In what sense do new media alter what is meant by religion, by church, even by God?”¹⁰⁹

Distinguishing between an image/icon or video used to direct attention to God and simply using an image/icon or video to be illustratively relevant requires continual discernment and an understanding of how an image impacts people. Some use clips from contemporary films for illustrative purposes, regardless of the content or appropriateness of the entire film. If we understand the theological purposes of the image, the sanctified purity of the artist that God desires and the Orthodox church enforced and if we recognize the significance of nurturing the spiritual development of the people gathered, as the Iconodules and their communities of faith did, we will need to examine the choices made in these circumstances.

The major difficulty or stumbling block for us to consider in these times is the cultural emphasis on beauty and physical appearance. Through media of all kinds we are challenged with

¹⁰⁷ Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication*, 113.

¹⁰⁸ Walker, Keith. *Images or Idols?: The Place of Sacred Art in Churches Today*, 107.

¹⁰⁹ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, 19.

the concept of beauty as a standard of success. “Many of the posters and statues in our churches and any of the illustrations in our religious calendars, as well as a great deal of our sentimental religious music, must therefore be criticized as ecclesiastical cotton candy.”¹¹⁰ Iconic representations were about excellence and honouring God, not primarily about aesthetic beauty. It is only after the Reformation divide did art begin to find its own identity and capturing beauty took precedence over portraying transcendence.

The Purpose of Image for Today’s Church

The purpose of using image/icon in today’s church settings is no different than it has ever been. Now, as we settle into the 21st Century, we are increasingly aware of the power and sway that both technology and image can hold over us and it should be part of the mandate of the church not to shrink back from it, but to rediscover how to benefit from and utilize¹¹¹ image/icon for Kingdom purposes. “A church that is aware...will be better equipped to adapt presentational technologies in a way that respects tradition but is open to opportunities to practice worship even more fittingly.”¹¹²

The use of image/icon must be a ‘window’ to allow people to encounter the transcendent nature of God. Though the image/icon is physically present, whether historically created on canvas or sculpted from wood or stone, it provides a portal through which the observer/participant can sense and experience the divine.

¹¹⁰ Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication*, 136.

¹¹¹ Leonard Sweet, *24 Transitions For Moving Into the 21st Century*. 1996 [document online]. www.leonardsweet.com, ; Internet; accessed 10 June 2004.

¹¹² Quentin J. Schultze, *High Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004) 74.

Moses offered the redemption of God to the Israelites by lifting high the bronze serpent (Numbers 21:9). It wasn't the staff upon which the serpent was mounted that people revered, nor was it the object atop the staff, it was God who they worshiped. It was as if they were looking through time, beyond the object, toward the saving grace of Jesus (John 3:14). That is the purpose of a venerating image/icon: to move people from the temporal to the eternal.

Any use of projection technology must be handled in like manner. "A visual theology, in short, has the possibility of enhancing the communication within the sanctuary; it can be a source of idolatry as well. Tomorrow's ecumenical theologizing must confront this creative tension."¹¹³ There needs to be a continual reminder about the redemptive purposes¹¹⁴ behind its use in order to shield against the temptation to revere the technological "staff" or the projected object rather than the redemptive purpose of the images that lie within and beyond its display.

What affects our hearts and inspires us to react spiritually in the Christian document are its authenticity and the authenticity of its authors. We can only express well what we allow to happen in ourselves by a humble and generous effort. The icon painter must be converted while painting the icon.¹¹⁵

These words by Pierre Babin hold true in this advancing visual age. Discernment in our choice of images must be key a component to its use. With computers and projection, present worship gatherings would be able to recapture and reintroduce the icons of ages past which were created by carefully chosen servants, noted for their humble love for God which enabled their skill.

New technologies will also open up other options for us. The redemptive purposes of their use should allow us to select the images and videos with reverent discretion, knowing that

¹¹³ Calian, Carnegie S., *Icon And Pulpit: The Protestant-Orthodox Encounter*, 140.

¹¹⁴ Walker, Keith. *Images or Idols?: The Place of Sacred Art in Churches Today*, 101.

¹¹⁵ Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication*, 141.

as participants in worship we can benefit from the use of projection technology to “awaken in us a new *potential oboedietialis*, a new capacity to hear the word of God.”¹¹⁶

Projection technology will also help in displaying photographs of God’s creative order that can be used to illustrate spiritual truths much like Jesus did (i.e. “lilies of the field”). Since most congregations gather inside of buildings, the use of images will recapture the ancient teaching practices that Jesus used.



(Consider the impact of using an image of tulips to communicate the “new life in Christ” that comes through “death to sin” (Romans 6:4-8). With current projection technology you could even show time-lapse video footage of a tulip bulb decaying in the ground, then sprouting roots, then bursting through the darkness of the soil and blooming in the Spring sunlight.)

¹¹⁶ Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*, 82.

Additionally, projection technology can be used to foster community within the body of believers by allowing foreign missionaries the capacity to “show” as well as “tell” about the activities of the Lord. Partner congregations would not have to wait for years to pass before seeing these missionaries any longer. Through available internet technology, or the mailing of CDs and DVDs this information can be shared, despite the physical distances, thereby enabling a greater sense of participation and celebration from the partner congregations.

The Future of Image for Today’s Church

The writings of Francis Shaeffer predate the vast rise in media and technology of the 21st Century. However, the impact of his writings, still have an effect on the shaping of our biblical worldview. Shaeffer was balanced enough in his thinking to recognize the importance of focusing in on the core values of our practices, particularly as it related to the communication of the Gospel. His philosophical musings cut to the heart of our quest for developing a theology of image in a media saturated age. He said, “Each generation of the Church in each setting has the responsibility of communicating the gospel in understandable terms, considering the language and thought-forms of that setting.”¹¹⁷

In this visual culture a growing number people are beginning to learn how to process the inundation of thousands of media messages that they receive on a daily and weekly basis. The Church has the opportunity to be effective in this culture not by retreating from technology, rather by learning to master it, as a tool or instrument, and using it for God’s highest purposes. Calian suggests that the contemporary church take the role both the iconoclast and the

¹¹⁷ Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Shaeffer, Volume I* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Book, 1982), 270.

iconodule¹¹⁸ - exercising discernment – in order to engage the culture. Perhaps this is an instance where we need to learn from our history, rather than risk repeating it again.

Certainly what this paper is proposing is not an “image/icon” over the written words of Scripture position. There needs to be a balance returned to our services in order to communicate effectively and affectively¹¹⁹ in this culture. “Authentic worship may include, word and image, oral liturgy and multimedia visual arts (as well as music and silence, movement and sitting, and so on).”¹²⁰ Michael Bausch recognizes the opportunity that is now available to utilize projection technology as a portal through which God’s power and presence is revealed. For Bausch that means the potential for new creative images but also it means recapturing some of the past:

Today’s multimedia technologies provide us a way to show these artistically rendered stories of faith and life. Altarpieces from churches and museums around the world can be shared by projecting their image unto a screen. Images from stained-glass windows, illuminated manuscripts, and oil canvas can now be easily displayed with a computer, a projector, and a screen. Rapid advances in technology put the world’s great art at our desktop and with the click of a mouse we can see many works of art digitally reproduced on our computer screen at home, or in our office. Plug a projector into the back of that computer and you can show it on the biggest wall in your house or church, and you will see the full power of the artist’s rendering of that familiar gospel story. With a screen, and a projector, a congregation can experience this artistic interpretation of that story while listening to an oral interpretation of its meaning and power.¹²¹

Using image/icon through the medium of projection technology should also place some scrutiny on the life of the contributing artists. Granted this is a task made much more difficult with the ease of access that the internet provides. Therefore, some restraint will need to be exercised. An awareness of the scrutiny and accountability placed on the spiritual development

¹¹⁸ Calian, Carnegie S., *Icon And Pulpit: The Protestant-Orthodox Encounter*, 135.

¹¹⁹ Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication*, 63.

¹²⁰ Michael G. Bausch, *Silver Screen, Sacred Story: Using Multimedia in Worship*, (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), 3.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

of the iconographers of centuries past should serve to inform us of the importance of this task, for all elements of our service not just those involved in projection technology.

Certainly those individuals who handle the teaching of the scriptures are generally placed under considerable scrutiny (and should because of the influence through their spoken words). However, noting the powerful impact that images can have on people, shouldn't those who create (or select) new images be under a comparable scrutiny? What does that mean for other elements that direct the flow of congregational gatherings, like music and drama?

Having a more purposeful spiritual approach, rather than simply an artistic approach will perhaps allow for the discovery of creative spiritual gifts that have lay dormant within our congregational settings. Perhaps it will awaken their God-given capacity to strengthen others with their representations created first out of reverence to God (Ephesians 4:16). We need to be praying for and looking to nurture the “new iconographer” in the character of the historic iconographer, demonstrating what Babin recognizes as those who showed “incredible courage ... (and) who dared to give up a cultural system inherited from their ancestors and to create a completely different system based on a new technology.”¹²²

What is vitally important in this visual age is the continual reinforcement on the transformational presence of Christ within the artist. Babin contends that it is not about an individual's passion for art or the excellence of their creative ability that we should seek to recognize. Nor is it the attractiveness of the rendering. The new image/icon must flow as an outworking of a devotion to God. Therefore art and image become a service rendered freely to God and with God at the core. In so doing it venerates God, becoming a “window” through which the glory of the Lord encountered.

¹²² Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication*, 28.

CONCLUSION

Experiencing Today's Icon – The Bridge

Knowing that images can conjure up different meanings for different people it is necessary to provide a bridge in order to clearly communicate the revelatory intentions of the what is being seen. Those who lead a congregation, particularly the “preacher” have the opportunity to provide this bridge and therefore maximize the use of image/icon within the parameters suggested in this study.

The capacity to bear in mind the potential pitfalls of using projection technology should free a greater range of communities of faith to integrate the use of image/icon within the normal flow of their worship services or gatherings. However their use cannot be done in isolation.

Let's speak to a society that is hungry for something but doesn't yet know what. Let's speak their language and give them our message. You wouldn't support a missionary to a foreign country if they refused to learn the language in order to communicate, just as you wouldn't purchase a book in a language you didn't understand. It is not a matter of the desire you or I might have. I would love to be able to read a book in Japanese but regardless of how much I want to, the ability and the knowledge are not there. This is how we must communicate, this is our challenge.¹²³

The historic icon, the evolving use of image and the present day video age all represent diverse means of communication during varies stages of our human history. Their use, however, has vacillated throughout that history, particularly as it relates to the gathered church. The above quote from George Temple, president of sermons spice.com is another reminder that the use of image/icon and video, in corporate worship settings, should not be approached from an entertainment perspective. Rather with video, as in all elements of our liturgy, there should be a commitment to creating space for the transcendence of God to be impressed on those who are

¹²³ George Temple, “Why Use Video in Preaching”, *Preaching Magazine*, (Vol. 22, No. 1, July/August 2006).

there. The use of image/icon should not seek primarily to be beautiful or spectacular but should first seek to be a window or portal through which eternal truths and presence of God are encountered. Although both beauty and veneration are vital qualities of the image/icon, the order of priority is crucial. Those who seek to use images/icons should not be over-burdened by getting people to admire their creative work, rather the motivation should be in allowing people to engage with and be engaged by the Holiness of God.

In order for that to take place, we need to return to the examples that Scripture has laid out for us, particularly through Jesus' examples of using images in order to connect people with God's promises. Reading through the Scriptures, we are reminded of the word pictures that Jesus paints as he speaks, telling stories with vivid imagery that leave impressions on the hearts and minds of his hearers. From my present day perspective I am limited to recapturing Jesus' ancient word pictures, but those who were present with him, they were very often looking at the images of which he spoke (i.e. the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:28-29); the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14)).

The images were not left in isolation to make their own impression, rather the impact of the visual was made in conjunction with explanatory preaching and teaching that seemingly brought them to life. In our current visual age, it the recommendation of this paper, that this aspect not be lost. To have a significant Gospel impact on this current western culture, we need to incorporate the use of image/icon, symbol and video together with the purposeful preaching and teaching. One should not be exchanged for the other. Both elements should come together, as complements, to bridge the temporal to the eternal, as a window allows one to see from the inside to the outside. The potential to allow people to be draw by the Spirit of God into the riches of his eternal promises should be the incentive that we require.

The role of the preacher, particularly as it relates to integrating the use of image/icon and video, should be to “convey mystery, but not to mystify.”¹²⁴ The challenge will be for preachers to grab hold of the unfolding story of God’s Eternal Truth and be able to communicate in a manner that invites those who listen to find their place within that story. The preacher becomes a storyteller equipped with the Greatest Story to tell. “The message of the Bible is intrinsically exciting, fascinating and memorable. If our expression of that life-changing message is bland, forgettable, or uninspiring, we are robbing the gospel of its power and failing to help people love God with all their minds.”¹²⁵ We can make the assumption that the use of image has the potential of enhancing the redemption story that comes from the preacher, following the example of Jesus. The opposite of that is also true: the story of the preacher has the potential of enhancing the redemptive message represented by the image/icon. Robert Webber, furthers this concept by stating:

On the subjective side, the arts both embody the historical events of God’s saving action in history and evoke the experience of transcendence, wonder, and awe. They transform the natural, the human, and the material into the disclosure of otherness. They lift the ordinary into the extraordinary and return the transformed reality into the experience of the ineffable. In this way the arts lift us up into the transcendent reality of the future, into a momentary existential experience of the kingdom that is to come.¹²⁶

In order to effectively integrate the use of image/icon into a worship setting, a renewed sense of purpose regarding the manner in which we preach and teach is vital. For it is through the spiritual engagement of the Scriptures, through all senses, that hearts and lives will most radically and deeply be changed. It is the responsibility of the preacher to convey the truth of the Scripture in a relevant manner in order to allow people to recognize their place in relationship to

¹²⁴ Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on The Other Side* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 90.

¹²⁵ Bob Rognalien, *Experiential Worship: Encountering God with Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength* (Colorado Springs CO: NavPress, 2005), 97.

¹²⁶ Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 211.

God. The major ramification of that purpose is to teach people of faith to recognize the needs of others around them and desire to do something about it.

Dan Kimball, reinforces the idea of continually telling God's story. He says "We cannot assume that people know the whole thing. We must constantly paint the big picture of the Bible story and tell it in as many ways as possible through our preaching."¹²⁷ Eddie Gibbs captures the essence of the potential that exists for preaching into a significant portion of our western culture:

...nonbelievers will be exposed to the gospel in a highly contextualized form. They will not be confronted with a generic, propositional message, but one in which the big story of salvation history as recorded in Scripture is worked out in the little stories of the lives of each individual and at the micro level of the local group of believers . . . they will engage in open and honest dialogue with people they know well and consider credible witnesses . . . In a phrase, the gospel is about the restoring and building of relationships with a holy God and with one another in the body of Christ, as well as with the wider community we serve.¹²⁸

Although this type of environment is one that is highly valued by the "emergent" church movement, it conveys a message that is valuable to all congregational settings. Our corporate gatherings need to resound with a freshness that reflects the diversity of the journeying community. Innovations, like the use of image/icon via projection technology, will not be implemented just because it's new. Tradition will not be abandoned just because it's old. Rather these new communities of faith will "respect tradition as what allows the past to inform the present."¹²⁹

For the preacher, the greatest temptation will be to bypass the process (discussed earlier) required for effective preaching and jump ahead to the presentation of the message. The quest to make connections on the basis of storytelling has the potential for pastors under the strain and pressures of ministry to focus on the end and not the means. A predisposition toward the

¹²⁷ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 177.

¹²⁸ Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How we do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 199

¹²⁹ Ibid.

imprecise and experiential services leaves open the possibility of an ‘anything goes’ spiritual formation.

In response to this temptation, Darrell Lim, in his research regarding the renewed use of stained glass, gives a thoughtful reminder about the importance of being purposeful when incorporating the use of symbols into a congregational setting. He recommends starting slowly but intentionally when introducing an image:

...then proceed to spend about thirty seconds per service describing the liturgical implications of the image, and allow for a time of reflection so that the illuminated truth from each image can speak into the hearts of the people in the congregation. As time progresses and receptivity increases, I would likely spend more than half a minute and go further in depth. Where originally I would introduce one or two liturgical implications, I might be lead to discuss the image fully and spend more time in reflection and response.

...With PowerPoint, the use of stained glass images from that theme could be used, along with various other art forms that all seek to connect the worshippers to truths and realities that are not just ethereal but also both inspiring and solemn.¹³⁰

As communities of faith we always need to be careful to avoid alienating anyone, but be welcoming to all. Therefore we need to be aware of the potential to alienate people on the basis of learning styles (i.e. aural, visual, and tactile). The result should be ministry that is as inclusive as possible in order to convey the Truth and Grace of God. Even in these technologically advanced times, the need for authentic personal interaction must be a significant part of conveying truth.

¹³⁰ Darrell Lim, *The Historical and Contemporary Use of Stained Glass*”, 2005, [document on-line]; available from www.ccws.ca; accessed 15 November 2006; 13-14.

There is an exciting potential to use PowerPoint to stimulate our imaginations by speaking the language of experience, juxtaposing images with the Word of God. In the final analysis, however, nothing will substitute for intentionally sharing 'real-life' experiences. This shared meaning will always intersect with God's creation, and therefore will always find *some* intersection with the lives of the 'partially-disembodied'.¹³¹

When I think back over the years, I realize that the experiences that I am most positively impacted by are personal in nature. I can walk mind numbingly through any mall or department store, knowing that certain items will be found in certain places. I can walk into any chain restaurant and order by number without looking at the menu. Yet the strategic placement of visual images placed within these familiar settings can alter my purpose, change my mind and affect my choices. For the most part I can walk into any church and almost instinctively know what to do and when to do it.

Should the vibrancy that we're called to as a living representation of Christ engage people at a different level than our pre-packaged world? My sense is that it should. Should the manner in which we use images be different than that of our consumer-minded culture? My sense is that it should. Preaching and teaching (in conjunction with images/icon through the use of projection technology) that is willing to move against the current of our quick-access-momentary-satisfaction times will make a difference in this visual age. Preachers that are willing to foster this type of environment will serve to inspire and challenge their local communities of faith in a manner that will nurture individuals within that community to make a difference in the lives of one another and then to others.

¹³¹ Wayne Deneault, *Technology for God's Kingdom: An Evaluation*, 2003. [document on-line]; available from www.ccws.ca; accessed 15 November 2006

The Impact of Today's Icon: Moving from Theory to Practice

The Iconoclastic Controversy has left its impact upon the way in which we perceive the use of image/icon within our worship gathering. That impact can still be felt today. The unfolding of history (Middle Ages, Reformation, Puritanism, Fundamentalism) informs us that there is much empowering substance of our corporate worship that is lost (image/icon and liturgical practice) under the premise of preserving that which is 'holy' and essential.

Protestant History also tells us that radical change often separates people who should otherwise be united, based on their proclaimed affection and surrender to Jesus Christ. The use of image/icon resulting from these reactionary developments created a growing culture of artistry that, for the most part in the West, has remained separate of corporate worship settings. It is possible that a silent message is given that part of salvation is being saved from the influence of artistic expression.

Recapturing a use of image/icon in this media savvy culture will not come by a dramatic imposition of visual stimulation. To some degree, many evangelical worship services already have incorporated the capacity to bridge the gap to rediscovering God through symbol and image/icon. This has been accomplished by making purchases of computers, projectors and software. But many, like the author's current context, have done so because of its cultural relevance rather than the exploring the opportunities to venerate God through the images displayed. Others make use of the capacity of a computer and projector to project images and video with for the sake of emotional experience.

Time must be taken to allow those who gather the opportunity to connect with the use of image/icon as it relates to venerating a Holy God. The image/icon alone cannot do that. It will take, in part, consecrated artists (acting through their spiritual gifts, equipped for excellence, and

held accountable for their spiritual development) who believe in the transcendent power of God to make himself known through the visual. It will take, in part, the meaningful connections of the visual, moving from the temporal to the eternal. It will take a desire to grapple with the dynamic tension presented in Scripture between adoration and veneration. It will take the capacity to echo the example of God and the teaching practices of Jesus Christ which incorporated the use of images and symbols. It will take faith in the redeeming power of God's Holy Spirit to work through diverse elements and people, not just our particular preferences or traditions of expressing worship.

In this media saturated culture the evangelical communities of faith have the opportunity to take purposeful steps at rediscovering the use of venerating images/icons through the use of projection technology. To deny this opportunity is to risk missing the blessing of being used of God in extending the gospel into this culture in a form that it identifies with and understands. An indiscriminate use of image/icon risks reducing our congregational gatherings to entertainment or strictly informational media, of which we have an overabundance in the regular course of daily life. There is also a risk for further division of Kingdom, not unlike those divisions that have marked our evangelical history.

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