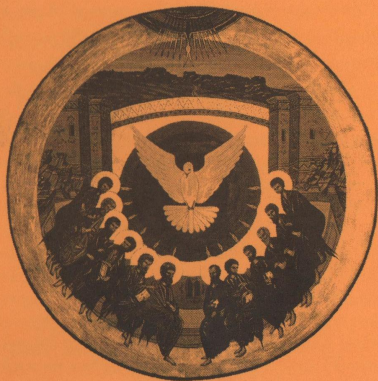


# KOINONIA



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John Coleman, 2008

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## Koinonia

THE JOURNAL OF THE ANGLICAN &  
EASTERN CHURCHES ASSOCIATION

### Editorial: *Icons in an Anglican Context*

CURRENTLY at the parish church of St Peter, Oare, in Kent an iconostasis has been erected. Even though this screen, set atop the altar rail, is for a temporary exhibition and is not a permanent liturgical fixture, the event still represents a remarkable step in the use of icons in an Anglican setting. There is a notable confidence in the use of icons in Anglican churches; icons have become so common as to be almost unremarkable.

The Orthodox have a fully developed theology of icons, but how Anglicans and other Western Christians understand them is less clear. The parish priest of Oare, the Revd Carolin Clapperton, has said, 'We hope that through art and music, people of all faiths and none will come to St Peter's and find here a place of peace, a place for prayer and quiet reflection and that the exhibition *Divine Dimensions* will indeed lead people into a sense of the divine.' Icons, perhaps because they confound the conventions of Western art, have an exotic fascination that entices the contemporary spiritual seeker. Like Gregorian chant (popularly used as 'chilling out' music after a rave), they create an atmosphere of contemplation and stillness.

Icons and chant, however, have their own inherent spiritual integrity which our contemporaries are unlikely to apprehend if they regard them simply as beautiful visual or aural wallpaper, or even as 'art' as our post-modern world understands art. Our Reformation forebears had a similar difficulty with icons and other images because they did not understand the theology of icons and saw them simply as 'idols'. This number of KOINONIA seeks to trace the development of an Anglican theology of the icon. *John Coleman*, an Anglican iconographer, describes his working out a commission from Bradford Cathedral for a unique (with no authorised prototype) round icon of

the Holy Spirit. While working without an Orthodox precedent, John wrote prayerfully, seeking to be faithful to the tradition while incorporating novel elements. It will be interesting to see whether such developments become characteristic of Anglican iconography.

The other article, by *Stephen Stavrou*, is much longer than a typical article in this journal – Stephen wrote it for a Cambridge MPhil as part of his formation for ministry at Westcott House. This is a pioneering study into the development of an Anglican understanding of the use of icons, encompassing history, theology, and current developments. The heart of his work concerns the Western misunderstanding of the theology of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II, 787) which informed the Anglican response to icons for centuries, but which has been completely overturned by an ecumenical consensus at the end of the twentieth century.

Ecumenical consensus is one thing, but popular understanding is another issue entirely. Westerners, both believers and non-believers, are conditioned to see icons simply as works of art. There are clergy as well as laypeople who see an icon as a form of decoration. Ann Walch, the iconographer who has gathered to St Peter's icons by twenty-three writers (including Sergei Taracyan, Irina Bradley, Aidan Hart, and Stéphane René), was determined to bring together in the context of the parish church a properly ordered and sited iconostasis so that viewers could not see the icons as in an art gallery. She wants to dislocate people, to use the beauty of the icons to entice them out of their comfort zones and to stretch the boundaries of their eyes and hearts and minds.

This icon screen should pose a significant challenge not only to the parishioners of Oare but also to Anglican church people everywhere. Even if we have welcomed icons into our churches, we have yet to assimilate the theological challenge they pose to us. An iconostasis is a standing reminder of the mystical aspects of our own tradition which we for a long time have downplayed, as if frightened by the non-rational, the supernatural and the metaphysical. So accustomed have we become to seeing the Eucharist as a fellowship meal that we lost sight of the dimension of Eucharist as sacrifice and ourselves as a royal priestly people going with our Great High Priest behind the veil of the heavenly Temple.

Now that icons have found their way into so many of our churches as well as into the hearts of many Western believers, it is imperative for us to take up the spiritual challenge they pose to us to see ourselves as 'very members incorporate' in the mystical Body of Christ and fellow citizens with the saints in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is time for us to let down the rational defences with which we have tried to protect our Enlightenment individualism. Let us instead renew our dependence on the Holy Spirit speaking to the Church through Scripture, the Sacraments, and the arts, so that the Church may be renewed in its mission to transform the kingdoms of this world into the likeness of the Kingdom of our God and Father, through Jesus Christ his Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

– PETER DOLL

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## Contributors

JOHN COLEMAN took up iconography in 1995, having retired from the Civil Service. His first works were undertaken for Hilfield Friary in Dorset. Today he travels widely fulfilling commissions, giving talks and conducting retreats on iconography. Where possible, he enjoys working on site so that people can see the work in progress and engage with the icons being written. A lifelong Anglican, he has also undertaken commissions from Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. His work can be seen in some 200 churches, including York Minster, Exeter and Bayeux Cathedrals, and his work has been exhibited in London and elsewhere.

The Revd STEPHEN STAVROU is an Anglican from an Orthodox background and has been interested in the relationship between art and Christianity since reading theology as an undergraduate at Cambridge. Subsequently, Stephen returned to prepare for ordained ministry at Westcott House where he wrote this thesis as part of a M.Phil. He is currently curate of the parish of St Michael & All Angels, Bedford Park, in west London.

## From Wooyard to Wall: The Story of the Icon of the Holy Spirit

*John Coleman*

WHEN I first heard about the idea of an icon for Bradford I assumed it would simply be a copy of The Holy Trinity. This was mainly because I was told that the chapel it was to be placed in already had a print of the famous Holy Trinity Icon by Andrei Rublev and from that I also assumed that this was the dedication of the chapel. Having done icons of The Holy Trinity before, it seemed a straightforward task. I was to learn that those assumptions were completely wrong on both counts and, as a result, this story came about.

It was about a year after first hearing about the possibility of an icon that I was contacted by the Dean, the Very Revd Dr David Ison. It was he who put me right about my early assumptions by explaining to me exactly what icon Bradford Cathedral actually wanted – it was an icon of The Holy Spirit for their Holy Spirit Chapel. Once I got over having my assumptions corrected I began to realise there were a number of problems in creating such an icon.

In iconography the Eastern Orthodox Churches have strict doctrinal rules about icons that were laid down by the Great Council in A.D. 787 and 843 after the Iconoclasm controversy. Among those rules is the insistence that there is a sacred duty placed upon iconographers to copy exactly what are known as 'Authorised Prototype Icons'. This is in order to conform to the Church's doctrinal teaching on any icon as any alteration, even by mistake, could change the story it told and thus be in error.

As mentioned above, the first problem with the Bradford idea was that there is no authorised prototype Icon of the Holy Spirit that I could simply copy. It meant for a start that, if I was going to create such an icon, the first thing I would have to do would be to break that strict Orthodox Tradition and create an 'unauthorised' icon. Ever though this Icon was not being written for an Orthodox Church, to break such a fundamental rule on purpose is quite difficult for some

one like me who claims to be a 'traditional' iconographer. A further problem was how would I create an image of that Third Person of the Trinity known as 'the Holy Spirit' in a visual way that would have meaning for people the instant they saw it when, in effect, I had very little to go on.

Another rule is that icons are said to be 'written' and not 'painted' because they tell stories in picture form of biblical scenes and the lives of Saints. This was to avoid the charge of 'idoltrous images' made during the Iconoclasm controversy. The more I thought about it the more difficult it began to look. But thankfully there is another traditional rule the Orthodox have set down about writing icons — and that is to pray about them! This rule means not only praying with an existing icon but also praying about the creation of any new one.

After talking with David on the telephone about this, that is exactly what we decided to do. We went away for a while to think and pray, and not only the two of us but anyone else around us whom we told about it including the Cathedral's Chapter and Fabric Advisory Committee. So at least in that respect we were conforming to one of the rules!

For my part I realised that, although there is no icon of the Holy Spirit as such, He is depicted in various ways in other icons that relate to biblical events, such as a dove in the Baptism of Christ or as Tongues of Flame in some Pentecost icons. Both of these are very familiar images that I could use, but there is one very striking depiction in early Egyptian Coptic icons of Pentecost that is probably not familiar to us at all. Those early Copts often adapted imagery they saw on the walls of long abandoned pharaonic temples into their icons, and they had borrowed the symbol which the ancient Egyptians used for their Sun God Ra, a sunburst, to depict the Holy Spirit. That dramatic symbol has appeared on every version of Pentecost ever since, so we decided we must use it in this Icon along with the dove and flames images.

After a further few weeks of prayer, thinking and communication, the Dean then dropped another total surprise in my lap by suggesting that the Icon should be a round one and not the normal traditional rectangular format, in order to symbolise the work of the Spirit in the creation of the world. So now we were not only creating an unauthorised icon, it was to be done on a highly unusual shape.

Once I got my breath back, and thought more about it, the more I liked the idea. The only precedent I knew of was a small round icon more like a picture, I had once seen in a round niche in a Roman Catholic church.

The next problem was how big? David finally came up with 32½ inches (80cm) diameter for the Icon giving me yet another problem — could I find a single piece of wood at least that wide from which a single panel of that diameter could be cut? Previous experience said to me that this was very unlikely and the panel would have to be made from more than one piece of wood, shaped and glued together — an additional complicated task. I went to see my wood supplier to see what he could do. Several weeks later I had a call to say he might have found what I was looking for on the Bristol dockside: a wood importer. We went to have a look and there was a huge piece of Sapele wood over four feet wide, four yards long, two inches thick and, more importantly, without a single knot or imperfection in most of its length. I offered a full-sized cardboard template onto it and it was perfect. So it was purchased and taken on a lorry back to the woodyard where the round panel for the Bradford Icon was cut. So unlikely was it to find such a piece of wood, just at the time when one was needed, that one could well think it must be an answer to a prayer.

One further problem I found with the panel was its size and weight. I had great difficulty in getting it in my car and more difficulty at ¾ stone (23kgms), moving and lifting it. With the rear seats down I could get it in my car but the solution to moving it was to fit some plumber's rubber tape round the edge, like a tyre, and roll it around like a wheel. After all this came the complicated task of preparing the surface of the panel with many layers of gesso (a base mixture of plaster and glue) ready for drafting the Icon's design on to the gessoed surface.

Then came all the communications, discussions and prayers about the Icon's basic design. We eventually decided on a design broadly based on and adapted from a classic fifteenth-century Russian Pentecost icon showing the Apostles sitting in the upper room positioned in a semi circle round the bottom half of the Icon. Each is shown holding a book (codex) or a scroll symbolising to whom they were going to tell the Gospel. In general Jews used scrolls whilst Gentiles used codices. In the background are the Egyptian-style temple

buildings that come directly from the very earliest Egyptian Coptic iconography. At the top of the Icon is the sunburst symbol mentioned above with twelve radii emanating from it to denote the Holy Spirit descending on the twelve Apostles. The additional centre radian, dividing into two, denotes the presence of the other two persons of the Holy Trinity – God the Father and God the Son. Immediately below this image is a local touch with the realistic depiction of the Cow and Calf Rocks on the Yorkshire Moors to symbolise the creation on which the Holy Spirit is coming down. Above the heads of each of the Apostles can be seen the Tongues of Fire as mentioned in the Pentecost story. The strange rock formations seen in front of the buildings on both sides are a traditional symbol seen in many other icons and used to denote that the scene shown took place on the earth. The red curtains seen draped over the walls on each side are another traditional icon symbol denoting the scene took place indoors.

The most striking symbol, however, is the White Dove placed right at the centre of the Icon, its wings and tail feathers dramatically fanned out as if about to land (Mt 3.16). It comes directly from the image described in the Gospel narrative of Christ's Baptism. Around it is the Pentecost liturgical colour of red.

In the depiction of the Apostles themselves, naming 'who is who' is a bit of a conundrum as there does not appear to be any consensus in any of the numerous icon versions of Pentecost. Most do not show any names at all, merely denoting each figure as 'Apostle'. There is also just as much disagreement among the numerous expert commentaries on the subject (which I may well add to!). Having studied many of those variations, I am prepared at least to put names to some of the figures based on the generally accepted rule in iconography that Saints are depicted with symbolic individual characteristics. This meant that people who could not read or write and therefore were not able to read any inscriptions, could simply recognise who was depicted in any icon. These characteristics included things like colour and style of clothing, hair and beard styles and objects the person depicted may be holding (keys for St Peter for example). In the Russian icon I have based my figures on (which in turn is based on much earlier Coptic versions) I can safely say that the first figure on the right from the centre is St Paul because of the characteristic curl he is always shown with on his forehead. (It is worth noting here that we do know St Paul was

not present at Pentecost but he is always traditionally shown on Pentecost icons because of his later importance. Another important note is that Mary is not shown. She appeared only in later icons with later interpretations). The first figure opposite Paul on the left is almost certainly St Andrew because he was always depicted in yellow/orange robes on early Coptic icons of Pentecost. Next on the left behind Andrew is St Peter, recognised by his red/green colours and hair style seen in all icons that show him.

Whatever we decide to do in naming who is who on the Icon, if Paul is included, it still begs the question who is left out, because, if the newly elected Matthias was there, as Acts 2 suggests, he would have added to the original eleven to make twelve. Someone must be left out. It's a question we can all ponder.

One event that took place during the early stages of drafting a design onto a full-sized scale paper drawing was so extraordinary it is worth relating. It happened when I was looking for a cardboard tube that I could roll the drawing into which would conform to the size regulations of the Royal Mail so that I could post it to Bradford. I got the idea of going into a carpet warehouse and asking for a piece of the tube that new carpets are rolled onto. A very handsome young black man came to my assistance who looked very bemused when I explained that I did not want a carpet but a bit of tubing. Awkwardly I thought I'd better explain, and when I did, the young man turned out to be an Ethiopian Coptic Christian who not only took me into the back of the store to cut a bit of tubing for me, but then asked me if he could pray for our Icon — which he did! I was absolutely astonished and promised I would take him a photograph of the Icon in place.

It is hoped that all the symbolism we have used and placed into this unusual and unique round Icon for Bradford form a unified message to the beholder of the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit imparted to us all in creation and at the first Pentecost.

Throughout the process of writing the Icon constant contact was kept with Bradford and photographs sent showing its progress. Prayer was maintained throughout the work from both those at Bradford and the many who saw the Icon being written in the various places I took it.

With only some small detail features left to paint, the Icon was taken on its final trip with an outing to Bradford of the Exeter

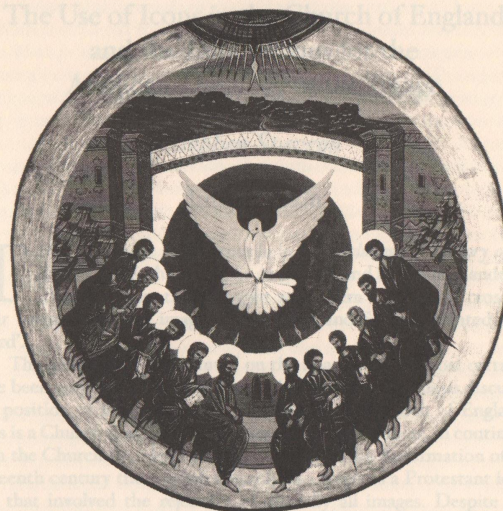


Cathedral Fellowship. They all knew the Dean of Bradford, David Ison, from his time at Exeter Cathedral and were visiting Bradford early in October 2008. I took the opportunity to travel with them and bring the Icon. Because the Icon was so big and heavy it needed some very careful handling to avoid any damage to the newly painted and gilded surface. This meant it had to be gently stowed by the coach driver, Jeremy Turner, into one of the coach's luggage lockers face up and securely wedged so that it would not move during the long journey. On arrival in Bradford it was equally carefully transferred into the back of the Dean's car for the last part of its journey into the Cathedral on Saturday, 4 October. Then, situated in The Holy Spirit Chapel with the Icon laying flat on a table, I began to work on those last details so that members of the congregation and other interested visitors could watch at close quarters what was being done. I was able to explain all about the traditional methods and materials of icon writing and answer the many questions asked.

The Icon was then finally completed in the Cathedral on Sunday 5 October 2008 during the morning Eucharist. The very last stroke of paint was actually put on, not by me, but very carefully by the Cathedral's Head Verger Jon Howard, who thus became an integral part of the Icon's complicated spiritual journey. Jon and I had worked closely together the day before to position and secure the fixings onto the Chapel wall where the Icon was to be positioned, so it seemed a very appropriate thing that he should do the final touch. (I hope he kept a mental note of where it is for future reference!) Just after the Eucharist ended he and I then very carefully lifted it into position. I must admit, although I had lived with this Icon for the best part of the eighteen months it had taken to write, I was very moved at the moment when we both let go of it and stood back to let the congregation see it in place for the very first time. For any iconographer it is the moment when one holds one's breath.

As with any icon I write, I cannot emphasize enough that it is very important to always think of this Icon as not just the work of the hand of one person or one artist but the spiritual work of many. For enshrined within it are all the prayers, ideas and suggestions of all those people mentioned above, who in different places and times shared in its creation, saw it being painted and then being completed.

Every one of those people gave an inner spiritual part of themselves to its making that will always remain with it.



Now in its place in the Holy Spirit Chapel, I hope it will continue to be a Spiritual Inspiration to all who see it.

*[The editor acknowledges with gratitude the permission of the Very Revd Dr David Ison, Dean of Bradford, to reproduce this article.]*

'The Image of our Lord and Saviour  
Painted on a Board':  
The Use of Icons in the Church of England  
and the Implications for the  
Anglican Theology of the Image

Stephen Stavrou

Introduction

THE Venerable Bede records in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* that when St Augustine and his monks landed in Thanet in 597, they brought with them '... a silver cross for their banner, and the image of our Lord and Saviour painted on a board'.<sup>1</sup>

The image of Christ painted on the board would almost certainly have been very like an icon, and with this in mind, this thesis discusses the position of the icon in the theology of the Church of England.<sup>2</sup> This is a Church that sees itself, at least in some respects, in continuity with the Church founded by Augustine, yet in the Reformation of the sixteenth century the English Church also received a Protestant identity that involved the rejection of virtually all images. Despite this heritage, in the modern Church of England icons are becoming increasingly common, and this phenomenon has even been described as 'an invasion of icons'.<sup>3</sup> The presence of this distinctively Orthodox<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1921, 74.

<sup>2</sup> I shall, generally speaking, avoid the term 'Anglican', which is anachronistic when speaking of periods prior to the nineteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Louth, 'An Invasion of Icons?' *Art & Christian Enquiry*, January 2003, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this thesis this term should be taken as referring to those parts of the Christian Church with Greek the original language of theological discourse, as contrasted with the Christianity of Western Europe (pre- and post-Reformation) coming out of the Latin tradition. It specifically refers to the Eastern (European) rather than Oriental (African and Asian) Orthodox. Although autocephalous, the European Or-

type of Christian art demands discussion because of its implications for the Church of England's theology of the image. Although there are an increasing number of publications about icons (written by both Anglicans and Orthodox), surprisingly there has been no substantial study of the role and meaning of icons in the context of the Church of England – despite the significant shift in theology and practice it represents. This thesis has therefore been written with the intention of beginning to rectify this situation by examining the theological implications of icons from three perspectives: prayer, liturgy and aesthetics.

Chapter 1 explores the effect of icons on the Church of England's theology of prayer. The decrees of the second council of Nicaea are considered by the Orthodox Church as the authoritative theological justification of the use of icons in prayer, and this chapter charts the history of the reception of Nicaea II in the Church of England, from complete rejection in the sixteenth century to almost total acceptance today. I argue that this is a result of three main factors: a weakening of the force of the Protestant theological objections to images; the devotional use of images in Anglo-Catholicism; and the transmission of icon theology into the Church of England through closer contact and dialogue with Orthodoxy.

Chapter 2 focuses on the liturgy of the Church of England, to identify the extent to which it is compatible with a coherent theology of icons. I argue that the justification of visual ceremonial and ritual in *The Book of Common Prayer* provides a theological rationale for the icon, which is an inherently liturgical art form. I also examine the liturgical language of the Church of England and the linguistic factors that have traditionally discouraged the use of images, and contrast this with the contemporary liturgies of *Common Worship*, which either remove or amend all of these factors, thereby facilitating and even favouring the use of icons. Then, on the premise of *lex orandi lex credendi*<sup>5</sup> I analyse two recent blessing liturgies in order to reveal what is

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thodox churches are in full communion with one another, and it is therefore legitimate to refer to this family of churches in the singular as the 'Orthodox Church'.

<sup>5</sup> 'The law of prayer is the law of belief'. This ancient dictum on the relationship between worship/liturgy and belief is particularly pertinent to the Church of England, which lacks (other than the limited scope of the *Thirty-nine Articles*) a comprehensive

believed about icons in the Church of England. The chapter concludes with an examination of some of the principal objections to the current use of icons in the Church of England and argues that the liturgical appropriation of icons takes them beyond the critique and control of Orthodoxy.

The final chapter considers the icon from the perspective of theological aesthetics and whether its presence and use suggests a change in the Church of England's understanding of God, the relationship between the spiritual and the material, and the means by which revelation is proclaimed and salvation achieved. Initially I consider whether there exists a distinctive ecclesial aesthetic in the Church of England. This is followed by an examination of what I have identified as three persistent aesthetic phenomena in the Church of England – transcendence, beauty and immanence – in order to identify the points of connection and divergence with the Orthodox theological aesthetics of the icon. For each of these phenomena, surprising correlations exist between the aesthetics of the Church of England and of Orthodoxy, especially with regard to the role of art in the sacralisation of space and the sacramental nature of art and aesthetics.

As part of my research I have visited churches of many kinds, including parish churches, college chapels and cathedrals, in order to observe the situation on the ground. It has involved meeting a range of people, Anglican and Orthodox, lay and ordained, theologians and iconographers, with whom I have had many interesting discussions. The reader will notice however, that the majority of my illustrations of icon use are drawn from cathedrals. This reflects the reality that it is principally in these locations in the Church of England that icons are being used in the most considered and developed ways. For not only do they often have the resources – theological and financial – that facilitate the use of icons, but they are also to some extent free from the parochialism (both literal and metaphorical) that tends towards artistic and theological conservatism. This is an important indication that icons are being encouraged 'from above', an observation borne out by the fact that perhaps the best known interpreter of icons in the

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catechism like that of the Roman Catholic Church or a confession like that of many of the Protestant Churches.

Church of England today is the present Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams.<sup>6</sup>

Although focused on a very particular issue, my approach has been interdisciplinary as the subject necessitates the bringing together of various fields including Patristic and contemporary Orthodox theology, historical Anglican theology and religious aesthetics. However, my own background as a Church Historian shapes my approach in favour of the long view of the historical narrative. Moreover, as an Anglican from an Orthodox background, I have a personal interest in locating the icon within the particular historical theological concerns and context of the Church of the England. Although I have always been interested in the relationship between art, theology and worship, the starting point for my interest in this particular area coincided with my arrival as an ordinand at Westcott House where I was fascinated to observe the interaction with and affection for the icon of Christ the Word of God in the college chapel. It is this same icon that Rowan Williams describes in *The Dwelling of the Light* when he says that it 'was and is for me and many others a profoundly significant image'.<sup>7</sup> This thesis is, in a sense, an attempt to unpack what that meaning might be in the Church of England. Consequently, in my final section I gather together the chief conclusions from the preceding chapters in order to take an overall look at the implications – actual and potential – upon the Church of England's theology of the image. At times it has been appropriate to examine Orthodox theology in conjunction with that of the Church of England, but this occurs only where relevant and necessary, as this is not primarily a comparative theological study. In fact, it is quite the opposite, for it seeks to demonstrate that there is an appropriate and even authentic place for the icon in the theology of the Church of England.

## Chapter 1: Icons and Prayer

In response to the Iconoclastic Controversy (726–814), the second council of Nicaea (787) articulated a theological justification for the

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Williams' two accessible and popular books about icons, *Ponder these Things* and *The Dwelling of the Light*.

<sup>7</sup> Rowan Williams, *The Dwelling of the Light* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press) 2003, x.

use of images in Christian prayer and worship that is considered definitive by the Orthodox Church to this day. However, the Church in the West did not suffer from this outbreak of iconoclasm experienced in the East and consequently there was no direct parallel to Nicaea II. Moreover, as the Western Church did not accept the ecumenical claims of the council, it has never considered its decrees to be absolutely authoritative. This is exemplified by the treatise known as the *Libri Carolini*, composed c.790–92, which attacks both the iconoclasts for forbidding images altogether and Nicaea II for allowing undue reverence to them. Although greatly disputed as to its influence, the *Libri Carolini* represents what has become a persistent theme of caution in the West with regard to the theology of Nicaea II. As the twentieth-century Russian Orthodox theologian Leonid Ouspensky points out: 'The western Church continued to support ... the Orthodox position of the Eastern Church ... [but] it never followed the east in the theological argument, nor did it understand all the implications of the Byzantine theology of icons'.<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that images were neither important nor extensively justified in the West, but in lacking a definitive theological affirmation the use of images in prayer was therefore vulnerable to attack. This took place in the Reformation of the sixteenth century when there was a rejection of the use of images in prayer in large parts of the West. The theology of the reformers and the subsequent iconoclasm has been widely studied. Less well known however, and more pertinent to this study about icons, is the direct engagement of some of the reformers with the theology expounded by Nicaea II and the extent to which it was received by the Church of England.

## *Protestant theology of prayer and icons*

### The rejection of Nicaea II

Although the Western Church denied Nicaea II ecumenical authority, it was nevertheless the reference point for all subsequent discussion of images, and therefore it was necessary for the reformers

<sup>8</sup> Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press) 1992, II, 216.

to dismiss its theological justification of images. One of the most thorough and developed critiques is found in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*<sup>9</sup>, in which he writes of Nicaea II, 'So disgusting are their absurdities that I am ashamed to mention them'.<sup>10</sup> Calvin regards the reasoning of Nicaea as seriously deficient: 'We must note that a "likeness" no less than a "graven image" is forbidden. Thus is the foolish scruple of the Greek Christians refuted, for they consider that they have acquitted themselves beautifully if they do not make sculptures of God, while they wantonly indulge in pictures more than any other nation'.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin rejects Nicaea's distinction between the worship given to God alone (*ατρεια*) and the honour given to images (*βυλεια*), which he calls 'one and the same thing'.<sup>12</sup> Calvin, along with other reformers, also dismissed the important theory that in prayer 'the honour given to the image passes over to the prototype'.<sup>13</sup> As early as 1503, Erasmus in his *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, had refuted the idea that images bore any significant resemblance with the original they alleged to depict, thus arguing that the representative ability of images was virtually nil: 'The thynges inuysyble are so excellent, so pure and so perfyte/that the visible thynges in comparison of them, are scarce very shadowes'.<sup>14</sup> This rejection of prototype theory is linked to a broader rejection of the ability of images to represent Christian faith at all. Calvin's view that 'images are not suited to represent God's mysteries'<sup>15</sup> was a revival of the arguments of the eighth and ninth century iconoclasts who believed that images were necessarily misleading and heretical. In particular they objected to images of Christ, believing it was impossi-

ble accurately to depict his dual nature, and Calvin likewise says that in images Christ is 'represented falsely and with an insult to his majesty'.<sup>16</sup> Calvin's overall conclusion was that 'whatever men learn of God from images is futile, indeed false'.<sup>17</sup> If images were by their nature false, then it followed that they were almost unavoidably idolatrous. While John of Damascus had held that Christians, having received God's revelation in Christ, were 'no longer prone to idolatry',<sup>18</sup> the reformers stressed the inherent predisposition of all humanity (Christians included) towards idolatry because of sin. Calvin famously asserted that 'man's nature ... is a perpetual factory of idols'.<sup>19</sup>

Another important aspect of the Nicene justification of images was their invaluable role as aids to prayer. John of Damascus contended that 'Our analogies are not capable of raising us immediately to intellectual contemplation but need natural and familiar points of reference'.<sup>20</sup> Outward images were essential because physical beings required material assistance with regard to spiritual matters. Erasmus directly disagreed, saying that 'Spiritual reality is reachable without [the help of] matter'<sup>21</sup> and 'You can only establish perfect piety when you turn away from visible things'.<sup>22</sup> He was a vocal exponent of a theology that emphasised the spiritual and inward aspects of faith over against its external and material manifestations. This 'spiritualism' became a hallmark of the Protestant theology of prayer and was applied directly to images. Andreas Karlstadt, the instigator of the first large-scale outbreak of Reformation iconoclasm at Wittenberg in 1523, declared that 'God is spiritual, and it [the spiritual] alone is useful to believers'.<sup>23</sup> This view is evident in the decision of the town council of Zurich in 1524 to prohibit images because God 'should be honoured

<sup>9</sup> First published 1536, reissued with additions in 1539, 1543 and 1559.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London: SCM) 1961, 115.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 104.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 111. The relevant passage from the decree of Nicaea is 'and to these [images] should be given due salutation and honourable reverence (*ασπασμον και τιμ ητικην προσκυνησιν*), not indeed that true worship of faith (*ατρεια*) which pertains alone to the divine nature ...'. *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers, XIV, (Oxford: James Parker) 1900, 550.

<sup>13</sup> John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers, IX, (Oxford: James Parker) 1900, 88.

<sup>14</sup> Erasmus, *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1981, 89.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 102.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 105.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 105.

<sup>18</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press) 2003, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 108.

<sup>20</sup> John, *Treatises*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Erasmus, *Enchiridion*, quoted in Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1986, 36.

<sup>22</sup> Erasmus, *Enchiridion* quoted in Eire, *War Against the Idols*, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Andreas Karlstadt, *On the Abolition of Images* quoted in Eire, *War Against the Idols*, 22.

and prayed to in men's hearts alone'.<sup>24</sup> Thus the continental reformers rejected Nicaea II not only because of particular theological points but due to a completely different metaphysics of prayer.

#### The Church of England's acceptance of the Protestant rejection of Nicaea II

In the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) the Church of England accepted the Protestant critique of Nicaea described above, and this iconoclastic theology soon took full effect in England. The sixteenth-century Church of England's theology of images can be found in the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* (1571). The third part, entitled, 'The confutation of the principal Arguments which are used to be made for the Maintenance of Images', specifically refutes the 'horrible blasphemies' of Nicaea II. The *Homily* dismisses the difference between the terms 'idol' and 'image' on the grounds that 'the Scriptures use the said two words (idols and images) indifferently',<sup>25</sup> and also rejects the proposition that there is a kind of honour (different from the worship of God) which is appropriate to images, calling this a 'lewd distinction'.<sup>27</sup> Agreeing with the iconoclasts, the *Homily* declares that 'no image can be made of Christ, but a lying image ... for Christ is God and man', and therefore images 'teach no things of God, of our Saviour Christ and of his saints, but lies and errors'.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, 'idolatry ... cannot possibly be escaped and avoided' wherever there are images.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, Erasmus' position on images was well known in England, and we see his direct influence reflected in Bishop John Hooper's *A declaration of Christ and his Office* (1547) when he says that 'people should not be taught by images nor by reliques, as Erasmus of Rotterdam ... well declareth'.<sup>30</sup> The *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* also illustrates the adoption of the spiritual metaphysic of prayer when it

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in George Potter, *Huldrych Zwingli* (London: Edward Arnold) 1978, 28.

<sup>25</sup> *Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches* (Liverpool: Nuttall, Fisher & Dixon) 1811, 156.

<sup>26</sup> *Homilies*, 118.

<sup>27</sup> *Homilies*, 151.

<sup>28</sup> *Homilies*, 144-5.

<sup>29</sup> *Homilies*, 148.

<sup>30</sup> John Hooper, *Early Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1843, 46.

says that images are unacceptable because 'God is pure spirit'.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the *Homily Concerning Prayer* clearly articulates an inward-focused theology of prayer, saying that 'true prayer doth consist not so much in the outward sound and the voice of words, as in the inward groaning and crying of the heart to God'.<sup>32</sup> The publication<sup>33</sup> of the second book of *Homilies* in the reign of Elizabeth I helped nominally to impress Calvinistic theology upon the Church of England. This is reflected in the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* (1563), which along with the *Ordinal* and *The Book of Common Prayer* make up the historic formularies of the Church of England and are the foundation of its theological identity. Canon A5 entitled *Of the doctrine of the Church of England* states that:

The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal.<sup>34</sup>

However, as *Article XXII* makes clear in its specific prohibition of the 'Worshipping, and Adoration ... of Images', Nicaea II cannot be one of those acceptable councils because images are a 'thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God'.

#### Laudian and Anglo-Catholic theology of prayer and icons

Subsequently, two related movements in Anglicanism – Laudianism and Anglo-Catholicism – have modified the Church of England's theology of prayer through their use of images, thereby helping to create the conditions for the contemporary use of the icon. In particular, I shall suggest that the devotional use of images in Anglo-Catholicism is

<sup>31</sup> *Homilies*, 144.

<sup>32</sup> *Homilies*, 210.

<sup>33</sup> The first book of homilies, dealing with fundamental doctrinal issues, was printed under Edward VI in 1547. The homilies referred to above are from the second book, which dealt with more practical matters and was published in 1571.

<sup>34</sup> *The Canons of the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing) 2000, 7.

not dissimilar in kind to the veneration of icons espoused by Nicaea II.

#### *Laud's theology of images*

Along with supporting churchmen of the early seventeenth century, William Laud opposed the prevailing Calvinism of the Church of England. Laud, through various prominent ecclesiastical appointments culminating with the Archbishopric of Canterbury in 1633, had great influence over worship and theology, the effect of which was to 'reposition the Church of England on the ecclesiastical spectrum'<sup>35</sup> in a Catholic direction. The driving theological concept of Laudianism was 'the beauty of holiness'.<sup>36</sup> This emphasis on beauty brought about a partial return of imagery in the Church of England.

Among the clearest statements of Laud's theology of images is found in his *Speech in the Star Chamber at the censure of Henry Sherfield Esq for breaking a painted glass window* in 1632. Sherfield had smashed the window at St Edmund's, Salisbury, on grounds of idolatry and Laud's speech against him is a clear rebuttal of much of the anti-iconic theology of the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry*. It therefore represents an important new phase in the Church of England's theology of images. Laud openly disagrees with the *Homily's* assertion that there were few, if any, images in churches before the sixth century, 'for we find them in the Church 200 years after Christ'.<sup>37</sup> This justification of images on the basis of antiquity is crucial because it directly refutes the *Homily's* argument that images were an abusive innovation unknown in the purity of the Early Church,<sup>38</sup> which only arose as infiltration of paganism.<sup>39</sup> In his speech, Laud claimed that the near successors of the

Apostles themselves not only tolerated but willingly accepted and encouraged the use of images by Christians and this was enough by itself to go some way in undermining the anti-iconic theology of *Homily*, which relies so heavily on the example of the Early Church. This is not to say that Laud supported the iconophilic theology of Nicaea II, which he called a 'gross council' whose 'absurd distinction of latría and dulia' is meaningless, for he was also emphatic that images must not 'have any part of divine adoration'. However, in support of images, he argues that there is a 'great deal of difference between an image and an idol'<sup>40</sup> as the latter is defined by the giving of worship to it. He concludes that the only images prohibited are those of God the Father, 'but 'tis lawful to make the picture of Christ, and Christ is called the express image of the Father'.<sup>41</sup> Laud therefore accepts the basic Nicene tenet that the Incarnation justifies images of Christ, while agreeing with the iconoclasts that it is not possible to represent Christ's dual nature. However, for Laud this is not grounds in itself for their prohibition: 'I don't mean to say that the picture of Christ as Son of God may be made; for the Deity cannot be portrayed or pictured, though the humanity may'.<sup>42</sup> In direct contradiction to the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* Laud considers images to be in themselves good as long as they do not become objects of worship.

#### *Richard Montague – pushing the boundaries*

Richard Montague goes further than Laud in *A Gagg for the new Gospel? No: a New Gagg for an Old Goose* (1624) in justifying the use of images in prayer. Montague, who was later to become Bishop of Chichester and then Norwich, was a patristics scholar and therefore well acquainted with the theology of Nicaea II. This is evident in *A Gagg for the new Gospel?* in which Montague uses many of the same arguments as Nicaea in support of images. For example, although Montague initially appears to dismiss the crucial Nicene distinction between *doleia* and *latreia*, he then says that 'honour and worship

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Fincham, *The Early Stuart Church* (Basingstoke: Macmillan) 1993, 127.

<sup>36</sup> Derived from 'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness' Psalm 29.2 (Authorised Version). The theological influence of Laudian aesthetics is discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>37</sup> William Laud, *Works*, Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology, vol VI, part I (London: John Henry Parker) 1857, 15.

<sup>38</sup> '... In those days, which were about four hundred years after our Saviour Christ, there were no images publicly used and received in the Church of Christ, which was then much less corrupt and more pure than it now is'. *Homilies*, 128.

<sup>39</sup> '... images came in amongst Christian men by such as were Gentiles, and accustomed to idols, and being converted to the faith of Christ, retained yet some remnants of gentility not thoroughly purged'. *Homilies*, 131.

<sup>40</sup> Laud, *Works*, 16. Cf. *Homilies*, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Laud, *Works*, 17. Cf Colossians 1.15, [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation'.

<sup>42</sup> Laud, *Works*, 17.

differ more than latria and *dulia doo*'.<sup>43</sup> His claims in support of images begin modestly, initially saying that they are only 'sometimes profitable'.<sup>44</sup> However, he then makes a remarkable statement: 'The pictures of Christ, the blessed Virgin, and saints may be had in houses, set up in churches ... respect and honour may be given unto them ... for helps of piety, in rememoration, and more effectual representing of the prototype'.<sup>45</sup> This is a paraphrase of the Nicene decree that:

'The holy images ... should be set forth in the holy churches of God ... in pictures both in houses and the wayside, to wit, the figure of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, of our spotless Lady the Mother of God, of the honourable Angels, of all the Saints ... For by so much more frequently as they are seen in artistic representation, by so much more readily are men lifted up to the memory of their prototypes and to a longing after them ...'<sup>46</sup>

Here we have an almost complete acceptance of the use of images in prayer articulated in accordance with the theology of Nicaea II.<sup>47</sup> Montague was not necessarily typical of all Laudians, but his view is unlikely to have been entirely unrepresentative either. The espousal of images by Laud, Montague and other high churchmen of the early seventeenth century represents a significant movement away from the Protestant theology of prayer, and this is reflected in their commission of religious paintings, stained glass and even statues for places of worship.<sup>48</sup> The iconoclasm of the Civil War prevented the fuller implementation of Laudian ideals but it laid the theological foundations for a return of imagery in the Church of England in the nineteenth century when the adherents of the Oxford Movement and the Anglo-Catholic 'Ritualists' would look back to the Laudian precedent for inspiration.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Montague, *A Gagg for the New Gospel?* (London, 1624) 309.

<sup>44</sup> Montague, *A Gagg*, 318.

<sup>45</sup> Montague, *A Gagg*, 318.

<sup>46</sup> *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 550.

<sup>47</sup> The only notable difference is that whereas Montague says that images 'may' be used, Nicaea insists that they 'should'. The extent to which images are essential is discussed below with regard to Anglican-Orthodox ecumenical relations.

<sup>48</sup> See the description of Peterhouse chapel, Cambridge in chapter 3.

#### *Anglo-Catholicism and the devotional use of images*

The theology of the Oxford Movement, had profound effects in terms of the Church of England's approach to images. Out of the Oxford Movement emerged a type of churchmanship known as Anglo-Catholicism that encouraged not only the presence of images but even their *devotional* use in prayer, and this undoubtedly paved the way for the use of icons in the Church of England today.

The Tractarian John Henry Newman's *Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles* (Tract 90, 1834), in which he reinterprets the *Thirty-nine Articles* in a Catholic direction, is indicative of the theological shift in favour of images that took place in the nineteenth century. In his discussion of *Article XXII*, Newman claims that the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* only prohibits *abused* images, which he defines as 'kneeling before images, lighting candles to them, offering incense, going on pilgrimage to them'.<sup>49</sup> Alongside this reappraisal of images in general was a reassessment of Nicaea II itself. John Mason Neale, scholar (and admirer) of the Eastern Church, described the Iconoclastic Controversy as 'one of the saddest controversies that ever agitated the Church'.<sup>50</sup> Partly as a result of this reassessment, images proliferated, and the view became increasingly held that images were consonant with the theology of the Church of England.<sup>51</sup> Anglo-Catholic churches such as All Saints', Margaret Street in London, were filled with statues and painted images. Some of these images were more than mere memorialising decoration, but were intentionally devotional images and actively used as such. Alexander Mackonochie (perpetual curate of St Alban's, Holborn, from 1862) was known for his devotion to the image of the crucifixion,<sup>52</sup> and the use of a processional crucifix at services was one of the charges brought against him in a law-

<sup>49</sup> John Henry Newman, 'Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles', *Tracts for the Times*, vol V (London: Rivington) 1834, 36.

<sup>50</sup> John Mason Neale, *History of the Holy Eastern Church*, vol I (London: Joseph Masters) 1850, 124.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. '... pictures and imagery in churches ... all these are perfectly compatible [with Church of England doctrine]'. Vernon Staley, *Hierurgia Anglicana*, vol I (London: De La More Press) 1902, viii.

<sup>52</sup> '[Mackonochie] was ... Master of the Society of the Holy Cross to which sign he bore an especial veneration'. Francis Warre-Cornish, *History of the English Church in the Nineteenth Century*, vol II (London: Macmillan) 1910, 138.



suit of 1874. The use of images was one of the factors that prompted a national investigation into the extent and legality of such practices in the Church of England. The 1906 *Report of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline* discovered thirty two churches where there were 'images with lights or flowers or both, placed in front of them apparently to do them honour'.<sup>53</sup> Images were being used as interactive devotional mediums of prayer in an increasing number of churches. The Commission regarded this as a serious breach of *Article XXII* and therefore both inconsistent with Church of England doctrine and also technically illegal. It concluded that: 'Such images ... are unlawful if they are made or in danger of being made objects of superstitious reverence contrary to Article XXII against the worshipping and adoration of images'.<sup>54</sup> Despite recommending that 'these practices should receive no toleration',<sup>55</sup> there were inadequate means for suppression, and Anglo-Catholicism not only survived but thrived – as did the devotional use of images which it encouraged.

#### *The theology of mediation through images*

In Orthodoxy, icons are interactive devotional mediums. On entering a church, an Orthodox person approaches the icons that are set up near the entrance, greets them with a kiss, makes the sign of the cross and lights a candle. Icons are understood as 'points of meeting'<sup>56</sup> between the individual and the holy person represented and are often described as 'windows' through which one can look upon heaven while at the same time mediating God's grace into this world. The mediatory theology of images was denied and dismantled in the Reformation, and it was not until the nineteenth century that it was recovered in the Church of England by Anglo-Catholics. Bernard Walke, an Anglo-Catholic priest living in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote in his memoirs: 'The Catholic Church has always taught the world apprehended by our senses is capable of bringing us into relationship

<sup>53</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline* (London: Wyman & Sons) 1906, 43. This was out of a total of 559 churches investigated.

<sup>54</sup> *Report*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Report*, 75.

<sup>56</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books) 1997, 271.

with another world'.<sup>57</sup> This is the fundamental theological position that Catholicism and Orthodoxy hold in opposition to the spiritual metaphysics of Protestant piety. The devotional use of images in Anglo-Catholicism has paved the way for the presence of icons in the Church of England by bringing about a theological reassessment of imagery on terms that are not opposed the theology of Nicaea II and modern Orthodoxy.

#### Orthodoxy and icons

In the twentieth century the icon theology of Nicaea II has been officially accepted by the Church of England in almost all particulars. Ecumenical contact and discussion has brought about a remarkable theological reconciliation between the Orthodox Church and the Church of England over the use of images in prayer.

#### *Icons and the history of Anglican-Orthodox relations*

A strong link is apparent between ecumenical progress and the current presence of icons in the Church of England. Some of the first icons to appear in churches were those given as gifts by Orthodox bishops, such as the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir on display at Canterbury Cathedral, which was given to Archbishop Michael Ramsay by Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople on his visit to England in 1967.<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, the present-day Anglican Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, describes their current popularity as 'one of the fruits of the renewed relationship between eastern and western Christians'.<sup>59</sup>

There has been a longstanding relationship between the Church of England and the Eastern Church, and every century since the sixteenth has seen at least one major attempt at dialogue and even reunion. The Reformation in England might even be described in part as an ecumenical effort to draw closer to Eastern Christianity, which was thought to have preserved many features of the Early Church. This is reflected in the historic formularies, all of which quote the

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Keith Walker, *Images or Idols?* (Norwich: Canterbury Press) 1996, 47.

<sup>58</sup> Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsay: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1990, 292.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Chartres, *The Icon Tradition: A Way into the Life of the Spirit* (unpublished address) 2006, 6.

Church Fathers extensively.<sup>60</sup> A later manifestation of this perceived affinity between the Church of England and the Eastern Church was the 'Greek College' at Gloucester Hall, Oxford, founded by Benjamin Woodroffe as a college for Greek students. Although the college was only briefly realised (formally founded in 1698 it survived only until 1704) it reflected the widely held and genuine belief in England that the Eastern Church was 'professing the same faith with us'.<sup>61</sup> At the time however, this unity of doctrine did not extend to the use of images, and the comments of English travellers to the Christian East were derogatory with regard to icons. Thomas Smith in *An Account of the Greek Church as to its Doctrine and Rites of Worship* (1680) speaks of the 'errours and corruptions which have late crept in among them'.<sup>62</sup> Icons in particular were one of these 'errours', which he calls 'gross and scandalous', and he ridicules the theology of Nicaea II as 'vain and idle pretence'.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, John Covel in *Some Account of the Present Greek Church* (1722) comments that the 'glorious truth' that images are not to be used in worship 'hath been obscured and abused and perverted'.<sup>64</sup> As a Protestant he refused to kiss or bow to icons, fearing that his 'purely spiritual reflections' might be imperilled by such idolatry. He contrasts the Greek Orthodox use of icons with the Church of England where images are '... still retained by us as ornaments of our churches ... [but] only as memorials of the saints and their glorious deeds, and as occasionally motives to men of understanding to follow their great examples'.<sup>65</sup>

This rather mixed approach to the Eastern Church is demonstrated by the sorry episode of the Greek Church in Soho, which only lasted from 1677 - 1682, partly due to the refusal of the Bishop of London, Henry Compton, to permit the use of icons. The prime mover

<sup>60</sup> Cf *Homilies*, 126f, which quotes an array of Patristic authors.

<sup>61</sup> *A Draught or Model of a Colledge or Hall to be settled in the University for the Education of some Youths of the Greek Church* reproduced in Peter Doll, *Anglicanism & Orthodoxy 300 Years after the 'Greek College' in Oxford* (Oxford: Peter Lang) 2006, 416.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Smith, *An Account of the Greek Church as to its Doctrine and Rites of Worship* (London: Thomas Flesher) 1680, *Epistle Dedicatory* [A4].

<sup>63</sup> Smith, *An Account*, 212.

<sup>64</sup> John Covel, *Some Account of the Present Greek Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1722, 346.

<sup>65</sup> Covel, *Some Account*, 399.

behind the establishment of this church was the former Archbishop of Samos, Joseph Georgirenes, who lived in England at the time, and at Compton's insistence Georgirenes signed a declaration that included a promise 'not to place icons in our church in London'.<sup>66</sup> However, when Patriarch Dionysios of Constantinople heard of this and other conditions he refused to countenance an Orthodox church without icons and his response to Compton precipitated its closure.

A more fundamental change of outlook about icons and prayer did not take place until the nineteenth century when the Oxford Movement popularised the view that the Church of England was catholic in a sense that included both Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Church. Out of this view arose a renewed interest in Orthodoxy represented by such figures as William Palmer of Magdalen, Oxford, William Birckbeck, and John Mason Neale. Palmer ardently believed that 'an Anglican Christian was *ipso facto* an Oriental Orthodox also',<sup>67</sup> and even sought to convert.<sup>68</sup> In 1846 he published *A Harmony of Anglican Doctrine with the doctrine of the Catholic and Apostolic church of the East* in which he commented:

'And the truth is, that when the respect to be paid to sacred pictures or images is so taught and explained, as it is by the Eastern Church, there is no Protestant who must not confess upon reflection, that he himself both allows and pays the very same kind of respect both inward and outward, to various inanimate representations'.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, John Mason Neale also made Orthodoxy more widely known through his translation of Eastern hymnody and his *History of the Holy Eastern Church*. He wrote in the 1866 edition of *Hymns of the Eastern Church*: 'It is, of course, a matter of deep thankfulness to me that the Eastern Church should now be more and more widely brought

<sup>66</sup> Doll, *Anglicanism & Orthodoxy*, 93.

<sup>67</sup> Newman in the introduction to William Palmer, *Notes on a visit to the Russian Church* (London: Gilbert & Rivingtons) 1882, vii. Oriental in this context means Eastern rather than Asian/African Orthodox as it does today.

<sup>68</sup> Palmer was not admitted because he refused to be rebaptised.

<sup>69</sup> Palmer, *A Harmony of Anglican Doctrine with the Doctrine of the Catholic and Apostolic Church of the East* (Aberdeen: A Brown & Co) 1846, 143.

before ordinary congregations ... God grant that this may be one little help towards the great work of reunion'.<sup>70</sup>

Neale's contact with Orthodoxy brought about an appreciation of at least the aesthetic, if not the spiritual, qualities of icons. The Russian Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow gave him several icons, which he kept these permanently on his desk. He wrote in a letter of 1860 to his brother: 'I wish you could see my glorious Icons. One of the trinity under the shape of three Angels appearing to Abraham ... It is the most highly finished thing I ever saw'.<sup>71</sup>

#### *Ecumenical discussions of icon theology*

Partly as a result of these influences the Church of England renewed its relations with the Orthodox Church and became more interested in the theological issues that separated them, including those related to images. In advance of the 1888 Lambeth Conference a committee was appointed to consider the relation of the Anglican Communion to the Eastern Church, and their report claimed that: 'It would be difficult for us to enter into more intimate relations with that [Orthodox] Church as long as it retains the use of icons'. It was also critical of Nicaea II and reminded the Orthodox Church that 'the decrees of the Council ... cannot be regarded as binding upon the Church'.<sup>72</sup> However, despite the frostiness of this pronouncement ecumenical progress continued unimpeded and when Anglican and Greek Orthodox representatives met at the start of the twentieth century for informal discussion on Nicaea II the Anglicans stated that 'its decisions when examined would present no difficulty for our acceptance'.<sup>73</sup> More formal talks took place in the latter half of the twentieth century, and while the *Moscow Agreed Statement* of 1976 only briefly dealt with the issue of iconography, the fundamental Incarnational justification of icons was affirmed: 'Like the Orthodox, Anglicans ... welcome the decisions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council [with re-

gard to icons] in so far as they constitute a defence of the doctrine of the Incarnation. They agree that the veneration of icons as practised in the East is not to be rejected'.<sup>74</sup>

Despite its evident caution, this statement effectively accepts the veneration of icons as a legitimate expression of faith in the Incarnation. However (as noted earlier with reference to Montague), Nicaea II makes the veneration of icons a necessity,<sup>75</sup> and this presented difficulties as the Anglican representatives could 'not believe that it can be required of all Christians'.<sup>76</sup> The *Dublin Agreed Statement* of 1984 went deeper into the controversial theological issues. It acknowledged that 'Anglicans have felt serious difficulties' with regard to images, and pinpointed two main reasons for the Reformation reaction against images: firstly that 'the decrees of the Seventh Ecumenical Council were not properly understood in the West', and secondly the 'uncontrolled development of visual imagery later in the Middle Ages'.<sup>77</sup> This presents Reformation iconoclasm as little more than a misunderstanding of Nicaea II and an overreaction against medieval piety rather than as a legitimate reassertion of theological or biblical truth, and thus sweeps aside Protestant theology against images. The Incarnation is again accepted as legitimising images, and the *Statement* quotes John of Damascus, 'now since God has appeared in the flesh and lived among men, I can depict that which is visible of God'. When described in this way 'the Anglicans do not find any cause for disagreement'<sup>78</sup> with the veneration of icons. The *Statement* continues with an agreed description of the theology of icons. The Anglicans affirm that they are complementary as a visual counterpart to the Bible: 'Both coexist in the Church and proclaim the same truths'. The *Statement* also accepts the prototype theory, commenting that 'an icon is a means of entering into contact with the person or event it represents'. It even goes so far as to describe icons as a means of grace, 'in response to the faith and prayer of the believers, God, through the icon, bestows his sanctifying

<sup>70</sup> Neale, *Collected Hymns* (London: Hodder & Stoughton) 1914, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Neale, *The Letters of John Mason Neale* (London: Longmans Green & Co) 1910, 311.

<sup>72</sup> *The Six Lambeth Conferences 1867-1920* (London: SPCK) 1929, 169.

<sup>73</sup> *The Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Review 1914-1921* (London: SPCK) 1921, 6. No exact date is given for the meeting although the pamphlet reports on the period described in the title.

<sup>74</sup> *Moscow Agreed Statement* (London: SPCK) 86.

<sup>75</sup> 'Anathema to those who do not salute the holy and venerable images'. *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 534.

<sup>76</sup> *Moscow*, 86.

<sup>77</sup> *Dublin Agreed Statement* (London: SPCK), 38.

<sup>78</sup> *Dublin*, 39.

and healing grace'.<sup>79</sup> This is a remarkable theological agreement on almost all of the theology of Nicaea II. It is noticeable however that the *Dublin Agreed Statement* does not broach the central divisive issue touched upon in Moscow – the extent to which the veneration of icons is a *necessity*. Nevertheless, the current presence of icons in the Church of England is in part a reflection of this substantial theological agreement.

## Chapter 2: Icons and Liturgy

### *Icons and the Ceremonial of the Church of England*

In 1967 Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople visited England and after experiencing Anglican worship on several occasions, he described the liturgy of the Church of England as being 'in the same spirit as ours'.<sup>80</sup> Admittedly, Athenagoras was something of an eirenic ecumenist, but nevertheless there is significant truth in this comparison of Orthodox and Anglican liturgy. In particular, both have a shared belief in the importance of ritual and ceremonial as an outward and visual expression of theological principles. I shall argue below that the presence of substantial ceremonial and ritual in the Church of England provides a firm liturgical basis upon which can be built a theology of icons that is not only acceptable, but also potentially consonant with the practice of the Church of England.

#### *Liturgical idolatry*

The Reformation metaphysics of spiritual piety described in the last chapter had a direct and major impact upon liturgy because its 'concern with idolatry extended not only to the use of art in worship, but also to the behaviour displayed in liturgical and social settings'.<sup>81</sup> Any religious behaviour or act of worship that was directed or even expressed externally was subject to accusations of idolatry and this turned all liturgical actions inwards. In England we see the operation of this concern to avoid 'liturgical idolatry' in the 1547 Edwardine In-

<sup>79</sup> *Dublin*, 40.

<sup>80</sup> Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey*, 292.

<sup>81</sup> Eire, *War Against the Idols*, 5.

junctions, the third of which prohibits the censing or offering of candles to images 'for the avoiding of that most detestable offence of idolatry'.<sup>82</sup> Despite this influence, the sixteenth-century Church of England retained more ceremonial and ritual in its liturgy than any of the continental Reformed churches. It could still be described as a liturgical church as it gave value and meaning to outward expressions of spiritual experience.<sup>83</sup> This is evident in *The Book of Common Prayer*, which justifies those ceremonies that '... do Serve to a decent Order and godly Discipline, and such as be apt to stir up the dull mind of man to the remembrance of his duty to God by some notable and special signification whereby he might be edified'.<sup>84</sup> This triple rationale of order, edification and recollection enabled the retention of visual and performative physical rituals such as making the sign of the cross at Baptism, kneeling to receive Communion and turning eastwards to recite the Creed. The liturgical theology of the Church of England is succinctly expressed in the Canons of 1604, of which Canon 18 on *A reverence and attention to be used within the church in time of divine service* enjoins bowing at the name of Jesus, 'testifying by these outward ceremonies and gestures their inward humility'.<sup>85</sup> It could thus be said that the Church of England regarded outward liturgical actions as a legitimate expression of theology and subsequent movements such as Laudianism and Anglo-Catholicism would build upon this foundation with substantially more elaborate ceremonial alongside a developed liturgical theology.

Given that the Church of England gives spiritual value and theological significance to external ceremonial on visual and performative grounds, this justification can reasonably be applied and extended to icons without stepping beyond the bounds of the Church of England's liturgical theology. Icons fit naturally into a liturgically orientated ecclesial life where ceremony and ritual are important because icons are

<sup>82</sup> Gerald Bray, *Documents of the English Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 1994, 246.

<sup>83</sup> Another aspect of this is the retention of more of the seasons and feasts of the liturgical year than any of the continental Reformed churches. *The Book of Common Prayer* includes twenty-seven holy days. See Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press) 2002, 147.

<sup>84</sup> *Of Ceremonies: why some be abolished, and some retained*.

<sup>85</sup> Gerald Bray, *The Anglican Canons* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press) 1998, 287.

themselves an art form borne of the liturgy and intended to complement and enhance it. Similarly, the Anglican-Orthodox *Dublin Agreed Statement* points out that at the Reformation 'Anglicans did not reject all use of bodily gestures and images in the worship of the Church'<sup>86</sup>, making this a potential point of agreement between Anglicans and Orthodox over icons. It suggests that praying or lighting a candle in front of an icon may potentially not be different in kind from other liturgical ritual actions already accepted in the Church of England such as the exchanging of rings in marriage or the baptismal sign of the cross. The *Dublin Agreed Statement* even goes on to assert that icons are as valid in the Church of England as 'music and chant and the faithful preaching of the word of God'.<sup>87</sup> This is a remarkable reconfiguring of the liturgical proprieties of Anglicanism in a single sentence, but it makes the point that speech, hearing and sight are all appropriate and equally valid aspects of the liturgy of the Church of England.

### *Liturgical language and images in the Church of England*

#### *Lex orandi, lex credendi*

As well as ceremonial and ritual action, the other main component of liturgy is linguistic, the words on the page spoken in the context of public worship. The language of liturgy articulates theological concepts and announces them to all present, and therefore liturgical words are of crucial importance in permitting and shaping the beliefs of the worshipper. This section will look at the significance of liturgical language with regard to the icon in the Church of England.

Linguistics has played a key role in the evolution of the Western Church's approach to images. It struggled to understand the icon theology of Nicaea II for centuries, as it misunderstood the text of the decrees. This is evident in the *Libri Carolini*, which appears to have been working from a 'garbled Latin translation of a Greek original'.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the west failed to find accurate Latin renderings for the pivotal Greek theological terminology of *δουλεια* (service/honour) and

<sup>86</sup> *Dublin*, 39.

<sup>87</sup> *Dublin*, 39.

<sup>88</sup> Maidie Hilmo, *Medieval Images, Icons and Illustrated English Literary Texts* (Aldershot: Ashgate) 2004, 23.

λατρευα (worship). Equally seriously, *προσκυνησις* (veneration) was often translated with the Latin word 'adoro', thereby implying that the respect given to icons was the same as the adoration due only to God. This linguistic failure resonated down the centuries until it was picked up and amplified once more by the Reformers of the sixteenth century who understandably rejected such theology as idolatrous.<sup>89</sup> The sixteenth-century Latin translations of the decrees of Nicaea II (1540) and the *Libri Carolini* (1549) both reproduced the ancient linguistic errors,<sup>90</sup> giving the Reformers important theological ammunition against the use of images.

#### *The anti-iconic language of The Book of Common Prayer*

The above example has demonstrated the impact that linguistic issues have had upon theology. Similarly, the language of the liturgy of the Church of England in the form of *The Book of Common Prayer* has fostered anti-iconic theology in the Church of England for centuries. For example, the opening malediction of the *Commination* declares that 'cursed is the man that maketh any carved or molten image, to worship it'. Furthermore, since the second Edwardine Prayer Book of 1552 the recitation of the Decalogue has begun the service of Holy Communion, and in accordance with Protestant practice, it uses the restructured Ten Commandments. In this form the prohibition of 'graven' images is a second and a separate commandment from the first, whereas before it had been a subordinate clause to 'Thou shalt have none other gods but me'. Not only does this disconnection place emphasis on the prohibition of images, but additionally, by uncoupling these two commandments the Church of England was simultaneously separating worship and images, and consequently the '... union of visual art with liturgy ... has only lived on in a debased form, if at all'.<sup>91</sup> The liturgical recitation of the Decalogue was reinforced by numerous texts such as the *Homilies*, catechisms, theological tracts and prayer books all of which further inculcated anti-iconic theology and conse-

<sup>89</sup> See Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Laws Against Images* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1988, 50 f.

<sup>90</sup> Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 53.

<sup>91</sup> Graham Howes, *Art of the Sacred* (London: I B Tauris) 2007, 11.

quently the Protestant discourse of idolatry became 'deeply engraved on the English conscience'.<sup>92</sup>

#### 'Conceptual Grammar'

The language of the liturgy however, does more than engrave theological ideas on the mind; it also shapes the very thought processes of religious understanding. This is what David Stancliffe, the current bishop of Salisbury, describes as the 'conceptual grammar'<sup>93</sup> of a language, which structures the ideas it can express. Stancliffe points out that Latin is a precise and legal language in which 'verbs are conjugated in a very precise sense of their temporality', and a consequence of this is that in the West 'liturgy is a linear succession of events ... and this is mirrored in the style of the [church] building' which is 'longitudinally planned' leading to a single focal point at the end of a succession of spaces.<sup>94</sup> This is also a factor in the Western emphasis on the linear liturgical cycle of Easter. Stancliffe contrasts this with Greek, which is 'less precise on temporal sequence'<sup>95</sup> and therefore '... in conceptual thought as well as in architecture, there is much less dependence on the linear, logical development of cause and effect, much greater emphasis on the eternal present of the events of the past'.<sup>96</sup>

As a result, in Orthodoxy the church building is square-planned, and this explains to some extent the incarnational focus and contemplative mood of Orthodoxy theology. The Eastern liturgy is a making present of Christ and the continual praise and glory of heaven rather than, as in the West, a transactional sequence of events in which the life and death of Christ are retold and re-enacted. The worshipper steps into the Orthodox liturgy and is held in a timeless moment, where heaven and earth meet and as it progresses one is drawn closer into the eternal praise of heaven. Icons are a product of this Greek conceptual grammar as they do not tell a story but are 'an invitation to

<sup>92</sup> Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 344.

<sup>93</sup> David Stancliffe, *The Grammar of our Intercourse: Communicating the Faith in the Syntax of True-Eyed Love* (unpublished article) 2008, 4.

<sup>94</sup> Stancliffe, *Grammar*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Stancliffe, *Grammar*, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Stancliffe, *Grammar*, 3.

a continuing action of contemplation'<sup>97</sup> of the divine. The icon is a moment to be experienced and not a narrative to be understood.

#### Common Worship

As a Western Church, the Church of England inherits the legal, precise, temporality of Latin conceptual grammar and moreover, through *The Book of Common Prayer*, it is also heir to the Protestant language of anti-iconic theology in the fabric of its liturgy. However, *The Book of Common Prayer* is no longer the liturgical experience of the majority of worshippers in the Church of England, and its decreasing use, first in favour of the *Alternative Service Book* (1980), and more recently *Common Worship* (2000) is eroding the historic discourse of idolatry and its anti-material metaphysic from the contemporary English conscience. This liturgical change has and continues to effect more favourable theological conditions for iconography in the Church of England as very few congregations now regularly recite the Decalogue at Holy Communion. Furthermore, the use of icons is encouraged in the General Introduction to *Common Worship Daily Prayer*, which suggests the focal use of 'a cross, a candle, an icon, [or] a symbol of the season or some other Christian symbol'.<sup>98</sup> The giving of an icon as a present is suggested in the notes to *Common Worship Christian Initiation*.<sup>99</sup> Such commendation of icons in the official notes to the Church of England's liturgy is indicative of the transition towards a greater acceptance of images and their increasing integration into its worship, but a far more fundamental change is *Common Worship's* emphasis on the Incarnation. This is particularly noticeable in *Daily Prayer* where the transactional Paschal cycle that runs from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost is balanced by the contemplative incarnational Christmas cycle from Advent to Candlemas. This incarnational emphasis shifts the conceptual grammar of the liturgy of the Church of England in favour of icons, which are predicated on this doctrine. The current language

<sup>97</sup> Rowan Williams, *Ponder These Things: Praying with Icons of the Virgin* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press) 2002, 4.

<sup>98</sup> *Common Worship Daily Prayer* (London: Church House Publishing) 2005, xiii. Stancliffe, as chair of the Liturgical Commission at the time, may well have had a direct hand in the inclusion of icons in this way.

<sup>99</sup> *Common Worship Christian Initiation* (London: Church House Publishing) 2006, 29.

of the liturgy is now helping to create propitious theological conditions for the icon in the Church of England.

### *The blessing of icons*

In recent years, an increasing number of icons commissioned for the Church of England have been 'blessed' or 'dedicated' in a mirroring of Orthodox practice, despite the absence of an official rite as such. These liturgical acts demonstrate the extent to which the Church of England has accepted icons, and are also revealing with regard to the theology that underlies them.

#### *The Orthodox blessing of icons*

In the Orthodox Church the blessing of an icon through a liturgical rite is common practice. It is not *necessary* as such – it is the image and not the blessing that makes an icon – but rites of blessing have assumed an importance as an official act of naming and sanctification. The Russian Orthodox theologian, Sergius Bulgakov says that this 'establishes a [stronger] connection between the image and the prototype'.<sup>100</sup> In other words, the rite confirms and strengthens an existing relationship between the material image on the icon and the person it represents in heaven. However, another twentieth-century Russian theologian, Paul Evdokimov, is keen to stress that it is not the physical substance of the board that is being blessed, but the painted image itself; he says that 'the "matter" of the ritual is not the board but rather the likeness'.<sup>101</sup> As an act of hallowing and dedication to sacred use it is appropriate to talk of the 'consecration' of an icon, and particularly in twentieth century 'neo-Orthodox' Russian icon theology the language used is frequently sacramental in nature.<sup>102</sup>

The *Trebnik* ('Great Book of Needs') contains the standard rites of icon blessing in the Russian Orthodox Church. There are separate rites for icons of Christ, the Theotokos, saints, and for an assortment of icons. Each rite begins with the public display and censing of the

icon(s) with various opening prayers and a psalm. The priest then says a long consecratory prayer explicitly setting out the theological justification for the different kinds of icons. Icons of Christ are justified on the basis that God 'appeared in the likeness of man and likeness of his own most pure Image' and 'in remembrance of the saving Incarnation'.<sup>103</sup> Icons of the Theotokos are venerated, as Mary is 'the Protectress, Helper and Mediatrix of all the faithful'.<sup>104</sup> Icons of the saints are worthy of honour because by 'looking on them, [we] might glorify Thee Who hast been glorified in them'.<sup>105</sup> The priest then invokes 'Thy heavenly blessing and the grace of the Most-holy Spirit [to] bless and sanctify [the icon] and grant it the power that heals'.<sup>106</sup> There is then a second invocatory prayer said 'secretly' by the priest, and the sprinkling of holy water on the icon. There follows more censing and the first act of veneration towards the newly blessed icon, which includes the words, 'we bow down in worship before Thy most pure Image'.<sup>107</sup> To conclude the rite the priest kisses the icon, and after a dismissal prayer 'he sets the Image with honour, in its own place giving thanks to God'.<sup>108</sup> I have described these rites in detail because I want to compare them with two that have recently taken place in the Church of England.

#### *Westminster Abbey*

On 25 March 1994, the feast of the Annunciation, Westminster Abbey held a service of *Evensong and Dedication of Icons*.<sup>109</sup> The 'dedication' was not an integral part of Evensong but followed directly on from it, although members of the congregation were invited to join the procession to the West end if they wished. There, the two icons painted by the Russian Orthodox iconographer Sergei Federov, were already hanging on pillars either side of the nave facing the West doors. This was an explicitly ecumenical service, with bishops from three denominations (Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox) taking an active

<sup>103</sup> *Trebnik* (Kiev) 1902, 217.

<sup>104</sup> *Trebnik*, 221.

<sup>105</sup> *Trebnik*, 226.

<sup>106</sup> *Trebnik*, 217.

<sup>107</sup> *Trebnik*, 219.

<sup>108</sup> *Trebnik*, 219.

<sup>109</sup> Available on request from Westminster Abbey.

<sup>100</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Centenary Press) 1935, 163.

<sup>101</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Redondo Beach: Oakwood Publications) 1990, 209.

<sup>102</sup> This 'sacramental' theology of icons is discussed in chapter 3.

part. Firstly, the Bishop of Stepney, representing the Archbishop of Canterbury, said a prayer by Thomas Traherne in praise of the Virgin Mary, although this was clearly not a blessing. Then, the Very Reverend Canon Vincent Berry, representing the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster *stretched out his hand* towards the icons and said a prayer that originated (as the *Literary Note* at the end of the order of service explains) from 'a Roman book of blessings'. Despite its provenance and the hand gesture, this is really a prayer of praise for the Virgin rather than a blessing as such. Thirdly, Bishop Basil of Sergievo, Fourth President of the Churches Together in England, *raised his hands in prayer* and recited all of the consecratory from the *Order for the blessing and sanctification of various icons, laid out together* from the *Trebnik*, part of which includes the words, '... [Thou] didst teach us to reverence the image of our Lord Jesus Christ ... thou hast not rejected the icons and likenesses of those who worthily served thee'.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the icon is claimed to have 'the power of healing' and the prayer asks that 'all who pray earnestly before [the icons], may be heard, ... receiving thy grace'.<sup>111</sup> No changes have been made to the text of the prayer itself.<sup>112</sup> The icons were then sprinkled with holy water, and the Dean (Michael Mayne) confirmed and concluded the 'dedication' by saying 'We bless these images to thy praise and glory, and we dedicate them to the liturgy of thy faithful people, gathered in this holy place, and we pray thee to hallow them with thy divine presence'. At the end of the service there is a *Literary Note* reminding the congregation that the prayer of blessing '... places the icons firmly inside the liturgical life of the Church, since neither the making nor praying before icons can be isolated from the corporate life of the Christian faith'.

Several aspects of this liturgy are remarkable. It displays a mixture of caution and boldness. Caution, because the title of the service is a 'dedication' not a blessing, and because the substance of the rite is entirely performed by an Orthodox bishop. Boldness, because of the theological claims made about icons in the context of the Church of

<sup>110</sup> *Trebnik*, 231.

<sup>111</sup> *Trebnik*, 231.

<sup>112</sup> Although the text used by the Abbey appears to be a different translation of the *Trebnik* prayer from my copy, there are no substantial differences of meaning between the two versions.

England. It affirms that the veneration of images is 'taught' by God and icons are vehicles of grace and a source of healing. Furthermore, in the words of the Dean and in the *Literary Note*, there is a double affirmation of the integration of icons with the liturgy.

#### *St Paul's Cathedral*

Although the title of the service of *Evensong & Sermon*<sup>113</sup> held at St Paul's Cathedral on 16 November 2008 does not mention icons, inside the order of service the rite is described as 'the blessing and hallowing of icons'. On this occasion, the rite was a more integral part of Evensong, coming between the Preces and a sermon. Significantly, the blessing was performed by Richard Chartres, the Anglican Bishop of London, and not by an Orthodox bishop. The service was not expressly ecumenical, although two representatives were present from the Roman Catholic community that produced two of the icons. Three new icons were blessed: two large icons, one of Christ Pantocrator and another of the Virgin Eleousa,<sup>114</sup> and a third icon of St Paul by Regan O'Callaghan, a Church of England priest. The icons were set out in front of the high altar throughout the service. The rite involved a consecratory prayer which included the following:

O Lord our God ... Bless and make holy these icons; may they serve your honour and glory and kindle the remembrance of those whom they portray; grant that all who venerate these icons may be drawn closer in love and faith to you; may their prayers be given wings to go beyond things temporal to the things eternal.

Some of the wording is clearly inspired by the Orthodox blessing liturgy,<sup>115</sup> but the prayer came from the office of the Bishop of London and was adapted for the occasion. The icons were then sprinkled with holy water and anointed with holy oil. In the sermon the Canon Precentor, the Revd Lucy Winkett, described her own 'conversion' to

<sup>113</sup> Available on request from St Paul's Cathedral.

<sup>114</sup> Normally translated as 'loving mercy'.

<sup>115</sup> The rite as a whole appears to be composite. The Trisagion immediately before this prayer is a feature of the Greek rite whereas the concluding sentence of the prayer appears to originate from the Russian.



icons upon realising that they were more than beautiful pictures but holy images deserving of respect and veneration.



Figure 1: Icon of St Paul (Regan O'Callaghan, 2008)

This liturgy is strikingly different in a number of ways from that of the Abbey. It displays confidence, as the rite is an integral part of the service and with a consecration prayer composed for the context and performed by an Anglican bishop. Moreover, the sermon com-

mends the veneration of icons, but perhaps most important of all, the icon of St Paul has been painted by a Church of England priest and shows the Apostle holding the cathedral itself (Figure 1). The entire service and this icon in particular, comes out of and belongs to the Church of England.

The differences between these two rites, performed over a decade apart, makes plain that a noticeable shift has taken place. In that time the use and presence of icons has not only become more acceptable but also increasingly integrated into the theology and liturgy of the Church of England. A particular feature of this is that whereas previously icons were almost always blessed by Orthodox bishops (such as those at Westminster Abbey in 1994 and also at Norwich Cathedral in 1998), today they tend to be performed by bishops of the Church of England (St Paul's Cathedral in 2008 and also St Peter's, Eaton Square, in 2009). These liturgies appear to be the practical outworking of the acceptance of the Nicene theology discussed in Chapter 1.

#### *Church of England icons – a contradiction in terms?*

In Orthodoxy, art, liturgy and theology are closely linked — one might even say united — in the form of the icon. Evdokimov describes them as 'integrated into the liturgical mystery', and thus 'we can never understand the icon outside of this integration'.<sup>116</sup> Consequently, there are some, Orthodox or otherwise, who would argue that the use of icons in the Church of England is theologically inappropriate, misleading and in essence impossible. Andrew Louth makes this point in an article for the bulletin of Art & Christian Enquiry (ACE):

There are those who would say that the whole phenomenon is a contradiction in terms, since it is impossible to pray to icons — an Orthodox practice — without being Orthodox, that is, embracing the whole system of belief and practice, both liturgical and ascetic, that constitutes Orthodoxy; they would point out further that icons are not an optional

<sup>116</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 175.

extra, as they must inevitably be in the West, but an essential part of Orthodox prayer and worship'.<sup>117</sup>

Louth admits that icons are not without *any* meaning in Western churches<sup>118</sup> but argues that they are always incongruous outside an Orthodox context. He highlights what he sees as the 'problems' of bringing icons into western liturgical space by discussing the Winchester Cathedral deesis icons (Figure 2).<sup>119</sup> This series of icons is positioned in the niches in which statues once stood beside the former shrine of St Swithun which was destroyed at the Reformation. In Louth's view, the location of the icons in the retrochoir (between the High Altar and the Lady Chapel) is not a liturgical space but a 'gap', and that the deesis 'has none of the liturgical meaning that it has in an Orthodox church'.<sup>120</sup> Likewise, Patrick Negri, a Roman Catholic priest, argues in another article for ACE, 'Icons, of their very nature, are linked to the celebration of the Orthodox liturgy, a liturgy we do not celebrate. Icons are caught in a strict theological worldview, a theology we do not share'.<sup>121</sup>

Louth and Negri display a rigid interpretation of the liturgical role of iconography as fitting with the entire package, as it were, of Orthodox liturgy, theology and aesthetics. In their view the use of icons by non-Orthodox Christians, although understandable, is a pale imitation or pastiche of Orthodox practice and therefore ultimately flawed. I disagree with this assessment. Today, the Church of England is commissioning icons from Anglican iconographers and having them blessed by their own bishops. All this is taking place without reference to the Orthodox Church, which suggests that the Church of England

<sup>117</sup> Andrew Louth *An invasion of icons?*, *Art & Christianity Enquiry* Bulletin no. 33 (January 2003) 2.

<sup>118</sup> 'It is certainly no bad thing that these icons draw people to prayer, that candles are burnt in front of them, that they seem to define, by their presence, some sort of sacred space'. Louth, 3.

<sup>119</sup> A deesis is a row of icons above the central 'royal' doors of an iconostasis in an Orthodox church. It consists of a central icon of Christ flanked by the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist and various other saints in attitudes of supplication, and therefore represents the prayers of the faithful in the liturgy.

<sup>120</sup> Louth, 2.

<sup>121</sup> Patrick Negri *Can a Modern Paint an Icon?*, *Art & Christianity* no. 36 (October 2003) 6.

has appropriated icons in a way that takes them beyond the censure or control of Orthodoxy. I do not mean in any way to diminish or undermine the crucial role of icons for Orthodoxy, but only to say that whereas it was initially correct to claim that the Church of England was merely borrowing icons from Orthodoxy, now the icon tradition is taking on a life of its own in a Church of England using them in a different way, for its own purposes and with meaning appropriate to that context. There are historical precedents for this kind of contextual appropriation and hermeneutical redefinition. Barbara Zeitler has examined the transformation of Byzantine icon ivory triptychs into liturgical book covers in tenth century Western Europe. These ivory icons were 'put to uses by western artists and patrons in ways that would have been considered unusual by Byzantine viewers'.<sup>122</sup> When panels from a Byzantine deesis were converted into the covers of the *Bamberg Cantatoria* (gradual books for Bamberg Cathedral), Zeitler argues that this was not crude and ignorant, but the considered response of a different context and culture to these icons. Consequently 'the panels were given a meaning and historical resonance which they did not possess in Byzantium'.<sup>123</sup>

The Winchester deesis icons are perhaps a modern example of such a process of 'liturgical inculturation'. Canon Keith Walker, who was intimately involved in the commission, was aware of the liturgical issues. He admitted to me that 'there is no opening of the doors on which traditionally they would hang' but that the location is nevertheless 'a place of prayer.' It is correct for Louth to say that these icons have none of the meaning that they do *in an Orthodox church*, but not that they have no meaning. They have a new and different meaning in the context of the Church of England. As Walker comments, the icons 'support the liturgy and if they did not do this they would not be there'. He describes exactly how:

<sup>122</sup> Barbara Zeitler, 'The Migrating Image: Uses and Abuses of Byzantine Icons in Western Europe', in *Icon & Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium* (Aldershot: Ashgate) 2003, 186.

<sup>123</sup> Zeitler, *The Migrating Image*, 191.

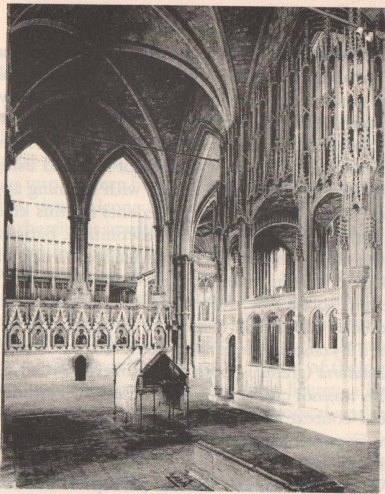


Figure 2: The Winchester deesis, seen from the retrochoir.

'The liturgical use of the Shrine occurs at certain festivals in the liturgical year, and it is visited by prayer groups of one kind and another. It is used for private devotion as well. The icons are seen as strengthening the connection between Lady Chapel, high altar and thus the dynamic unity of the whole cathedral!'

In short, here the traditional Orthodox form of the deesis has been reinterpreted for the liturgical context of Winchester Cathedral, and the placing of these icons on the site of Reformation iconoclasm gives them a significance that is intimately connected with not only that location<sup>124</sup> but also the history of Church of England. In so doing, they

<sup>124</sup> For example, the saints represented on the icons correspond almost exactly to the pre-Reformation statues which once stood in the niches, and whose names carved into the stonework can still be read.

have acquired a site-specific meaning and have been assimilated into the theological fabric of the building in a way that appropriates them for the Church of England.

### Chapter 3: Icons and aesthetics

#### *Anglican Aesthetics*

The aesthetics of ecclesial space embody theological concepts and are therefore always theological aesthetics. A survey of the Church of England's history reveals a variety of aesthetic approaches and this chapter investigates to what extent these are compatible with the icon.

At first sight, the Reformation heritage of the Church of England appears to dictate a *negative* relationship between aesthetics and theology. *Article XXII* of the *Thirty-nine Articles* states: 'The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping, and Adoration, as well of Images as of reliques ... is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.' Images, especially but not exclusively those of a Roman Catholic provenance, are clearly problematic. With regard to decoration the *Homily for Repairing and keeping clean, and comely adorning of Churches* maintains that churches should be 'honourably adorned and garnished',<sup>125</sup> which is defined over against 'fantastical adorning and decking',<sup>126</sup> thus this homily enjoins simplicity, but not necessarily absolute minimalism. However, in practice the only permitted decoration of a Protestant church is Biblical texts painted on the walls: Diarmaid Macculloch describes the appearance of the post-Reformation English church interior as being like 'the pages of a giant scrapbook of scripture'.<sup>127</sup> As the twentieth-century Protestant theologian Karl Barth emphatically declared, 'images and symbols have no place at all in a building designed for Protestant worship'.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>125</sup> *Homilies*, 176.

<sup>126</sup> *Homilies*, 179.

<sup>127</sup> Diarmaid Macculloch, *The boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (Los Angeles: California University Press) 2002, 159.

<sup>128</sup> Quoted in Howes, *Art of the Sacred*, 157.

However, the early seventeenth-century poet George Herbert suggests a slightly less austere aesthetic model. In *The British Church* he writes that 'beauty in thee takes up her place', and describes an aesthetic *via media* of 'a fine aspect in fit array / Neither too mean, nor yet too gay'.<sup>129</sup> Herbert commends a natural beauty characterised by unfussiness and modesty, which is neither bare nor excessive in decoration and this indicates the development of a *positive*, albeit cautious, relationship between the visual arts and worship. In the same period, the attitude of Laud and his followers to theological aesthetics was less cautious and their decoration of churches according to a generous application of the principle of the beauty of holiness emphatically asserted a positive relationship between art and worship which even permitted figural images. While Laudian values survived the Civil War, the experience chastened the aesthetics of the second half of the seventeenth century, which were noticeably reserved by comparison with the earlier part of the century.

The restrained classicism of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries characterised a period of relative quiescence compared to the aesthetic upheaval of the nineteenth century, which transformed the appearance of the English church. This transformation is aptly represented by a building such as All Saints', Cambridge (consecrated 1864), in which every surface is covered in pattern, picture, carving and colour: in short, 'every enrichment of the visual arts ... is used to the full'.<sup>130</sup> The Church of England's return to the decorative and visual arts of the medieval period indicated the importance that was attached to aesthetics in relation to worship. This trend has continued in the twentieth century, and especially in the latter half there has been a noticeable increase in the number of works directly commissioned by the Church of England, a development symptomatic of a renewed interest in theological aesthetics. The Cambridge-based *Theology Through the Arts* (TTA) project was founded in 1997, and one of its members, the Anglican theologian Professor David Ford, commented that he came to the conclusion that 'satisfactory theological enquiry ... required the

<sup>129</sup> Mario Di Cesare, *George Herbert and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Poets* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company) 1978, 44.

<sup>130</sup> Horton Davies, *Worship & Theology in England: 1850 - 1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1962, 130.

arts'.<sup>131</sup> Ford's statement reflects the reality that many in the Church of England today would agree with the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, that the arts 'communicate something ... which cannot be completely translated into verbal theology'.<sup>132</sup> For some in the Church of England therefore, aesthetics has become an *essential* aspect of Christian faith.

It can thus be seen that the Church of England has undergone several shifts in its aesthetic paradigm since the Reformation, and that its various traditions now embrace three approaches to the relationship between aesthetics and theology: negative, positive and essential.<sup>133</sup> It is in the context of this diversity that I shall explore the compatibility of the icon with the theological aesthetics of the Church of England.

### Transcendence

The theological premise of Protestant aesthetics is transcendence, and the iconoclasm of the Reformation was an affirmation of the invisible and inexpressible nature of the divine over what was perceived as the worldliness of late medieval religious imagery. Consequently, Protestantism is synonymous with anti-iconic theology and an aniconic ecclesial aesthetic. Representations of religious subjects (especially figures, which have the potential to become idolatrous) are at best problematic and at worst damnable. This transcendent theology effects an almost total estrangement of worship from art, ascribing no capacity for mediation or revelation to the visual arts, for God is to be encountered within. The aniconic aesthetic of simplicity reinforces this introverted piety with its emphasis on interior recollection and introspective reflection. The twentieth-century poet and cleric, R.S.

<sup>131</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Sounding the Depths: Theology Through the Arts* (London: SCM Press) 2002, 6.

<sup>132</sup> Howes, *Art of the Sacred*, 160.

<sup>133</sup> This three-fold model of relationship between the arts and theology is described by Howes's *Art of the Sacred*, 156f., and originally derives from John Dillenbergers' *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities* (London: SCM Press) 1987, 215f.

Thomas, not unreasonably called Protestantism 'the adroit castrator / Of art'.<sup>134</sup>

In England, the iconoclastic 'stripping of the altars'<sup>135</sup> and white-washing of the walls of churches during the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) was the result of the Church of England's acceptance of anti-iconic Protestant theology and its aniconic aesthetics. A central feature of the campaign against the visual arts was an emphasis on the Ten Commandments. The 1561 Elizabethan Injunctions required that the Decalogue be displayed in every church and this was reinforced under James I in the Canons of 1604, of which Canon 82 stipulated that '... the ten commandments be set up on the east end of every church and chapel, where the people may best see and read the same'.<sup>136</sup>

The aniconic aesthetic was based on the theological position that the revelation of God in Christ makes all symbols and imagery unnecessary. As the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry and superfluous decking of churches* makes clear, 'Christ our Lord came [and] turned all those outward things into spirit, faith and truth'.<sup>137</sup> This *Homily's* argument that the Incarnation makes images unnecessary is the antithesis of Orthodox theological aesthetics, in which the Incarnation is the doctrinal foundation for images. As Evdokimov says, 'God is unknowable, radically transcendent in his essence, but he is expressible in the Existing One [Christ]'.<sup>138</sup> However, Orthodoxy shares with Protestantism a concern to preserve the transcendence of God in worship, although it reaches the opposite conclusion about how this is achieved.

#### *Anti-realism and visual orthodoxy*

This shared concern for transcendence in Orthodoxy and Protestantism is evident in their joint rejection of aesthetic realism. It was on this basis that the fifteenth-century Archbishop Symeon of Thessalonica criticised Western artists:

<sup>134</sup> From *The Minister*. R S Thomas, *Collected Poems 1945-1990* (London: Phoenix Press) 1995, 54.

<sup>135</sup> The title of Duffy's book on late medieval religion and the English Reformation.

<sup>136</sup> Bray, *The Anglican Canons*, 377.

<sup>137</sup> *Homilies*, 167.

<sup>138</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 208.

'Instead of painted garments and hair, they adorn them with human hair and clothes which is not the image of hair and garment, but the [actual] hair and garment of a man, and hence is not an image and a symbol of the prototype. These they confect and adorn in an irreverent spirit, which is indeed opposed to the holy icons'.<sup>139</sup>

Similarly, Evdokimov locates the origin of Reformation iconoclasm in Giotto, Duccio and Cimabue whose artistic realism, he claims, 'lost the ability to directly grasp and portray the transcendent'. Without transcendence, 'art could no longer be integrated into the liturgical mystery'<sup>140</sup> and iconoclasm was the inevitable result of this loss of meaning. Likewise, Ouspensky considered 'mimesis' of the world as the root cause of iconoclasm.<sup>141</sup> According to Orthodoxy, realism eroded the sacred character of Christian art in the West by making it worldly, and this created the conditions for its Reformation rejection. This shared 'anti-realism' of Orthodoxy and Protestantism is evident in their specific emphasis on the proscription of images with three-dimensional realism, such as statues. Orthodoxy however, draws a clear distinction between statuary and two-dimensional painting in the form of the icon, which does not portray the world as it is but as transfigured by divinity, displaying something of the transcendent reality of heaven. Thus for Evdokimov the icon 'links two shores, the visible and the invisible',<sup>142</sup> and likewise Williams describes it as a 'frontier' that 'leads directly into strangeness'.<sup>143</sup> The 'strangeness' of the representational conventions of icons are all aimed at emphasising the *un-worldliness* of what they depict. Icons do not seek to reproduce the world according to normal human perception, but they present people and places transformed, redeemed and restored by God to the perfection of the *imago Dei*. To some extent therefore, icons are immune from the Protestant critique of worldly realism.

Orthodoxy and Protestantism also share a concern about the theological content of the visual arts. Symeon criticised Western art for what he regarded as its theologically improper originality: 'What

<sup>139</sup> *Contra Haereses* quoted in Zeitler, *The Migrating Image*, 185.

<sup>140</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 73.

<sup>141</sup> Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol. II, 489.

<sup>142</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 86.

<sup>143</sup> Williams, *Ponder These Things*, xiv.

other innovations have they [the Latins] introduced ... ? These men, who subvert everything, as has been said, often confect holy images in a different manner and one that is contrary to custom'.<sup>144</sup> An example of this was the increasing incidence of depictions of God the Father in late Medieval Europe, in contrast to the Orthodox position, which held that 'to give form to the deity is the height of folly and impiety'.<sup>145</sup> Thus Orthodoxy would agree with Calvin's view that 'God's glory is corrupted by impious falsehood whenever any form is attached to him'.<sup>146</sup> In a recent address, Richard Chartres pointed out that medieval art not only transgressed by depicting God, but its realism also had the potential to mislead the viewer into heterodox opinions because of a failure to depict theology in an appropriate manner. He contrasts this with icons, which are held within a tighter theological framework:

The various icon types representing the relations between Jesus and his Mother ... were written in a way that preserved the centrality of the Saviour. When sacred art in the West developed in a more naturalistic direction it became increasingly difficult to depict the proper dependence of the Mother on the Saviour ... [and] it became hard for unsophisticated folk to avoid paying Mary the honours due to divinity'.<sup>147</sup>

Protestantism and Orthodoxy are both acutely aware of the heretical possibilities of the unguided aesthetic imagination. Protestantism attempts to solve this problem by prohibiting images, whereas Orthodoxy seeks to control the creators of images, as noted by Ouspensky's comment that 'the Orthodox Church has never accepted the painting of icons according to the imagination of the painter'.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, in the late medieval period the relationship between the image and the viewer was changing in fundamental ways: 'from the thirteenth century onwards there can be traced an erosion of any popular awareness that

<sup>144</sup> *Contra Haereses* quoted in Zeitler, *The Migrating Image*, 185.

<sup>145</sup> John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 88. Depictions of God the Father do sometimes appear in icons influenced by Western art, and in icons of the Holy Trinity from the Greek tradition, although many Orthodox disapprove of this.

<sup>146</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 100.

<sup>147</sup> Chartres, *The Icon Tradition*, 2.

<sup>148</sup> Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol. I, 170.

images were to be looked through rather than looked at'.<sup>149</sup> The collapse of the distinction between the image and the person it represented was in part due to affective piety, in which the portrayal of realistic emotions encouraged a more intense and personal relationship with images.<sup>150</sup> When attention became focused on the image itself, it ceased to make reference to the transcendent, and Williams contrasts this with icons in which 'the figure depicted in the icon is not a figure designed to evoke emotion in us'.<sup>151</sup>

#### *Abstract art and icons*

In the last few decades there has been a guarded reappraisal of art in the Protestant tradition. In part, this is due to twentieth-century abstract art, which has none of the theological difficulties of realism. Evdokimov sees a direct link between Protestant theology and non-representative modern art. He describes the 'dissolution of forms'<sup>152</sup> in abstract art as a type of neo-iconoclasm, and claims that 'the iconoclasts would probably have had no problem with modern art'.<sup>153</sup> He is, however, severely critical of abstraction, which he believes has dissolved form itself in an anti-Incarnational aesthetic of deconstruction: 'By its very nature, modern art has nothing in it that allows us to know the word made flesh'<sup>154</sup> because it has 'left the incarnational biosphere'<sup>155</sup> altogether. Nevertheless, by transforming the general perception of what constitutes artistic representation, abstraction may have played a key role in the acceptance of the semi-abstracted visual forms of the icon with their inverted perspectives, impossible light sources and

<sup>149</sup> Trevor Hart, 'Protestantism and the Arts', *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism* (Oxford: Blackwell) 2004, 272.

<sup>150</sup> This shift is evident if one compares the serene Christ of the early twelfth-century San Damiano crucifix with the agonised corpus of Mathias Grunewald's Issenheim altarpiece painted on the eve of the Reformation between 1512-16.

<sup>151</sup> Rowan Williams, Royal Academy of Arts Byzantium Lecture: *Icons and the Practice of Prayer* (can be viewed at [www.archbishopofcanterbury.org](http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org)) delivered 2009, 7.

<sup>152</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 78.

<sup>153</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 87.

<sup>154</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 85.

<sup>155</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 87.

elongated forms. Despite criticising abstraction, Evdokimov does perceive a connection, claiming that 'abstract art has its origins in Orthodox iconography'.<sup>156</sup> A similar link might also be discerned in the work of Kandinsky, whose art has been described as having 'emerged from the Russian Orthodox tradition'.<sup>157</sup> It appears therefore that the abstraction of contemporary art might be a factor in the current popularity of iconography among Protestants.

Evidence for the Protestant reappraisal of art in the form of the icon can be found at Canterbury Cathedral, which has at least eight icons on display at different points around the building,<sup>158</sup> although the representative role of the cathedral both in terms of the Church of England and the worldwide Anglican Communion necessitates paying due heed to the Protestant aesthetics of the *Articles and Homilies*. This is borne out in the cautious manner in which these icons are displayed. Most of the icons are positioned at a distance from the viewer, or in such a way that would make veneration extremely difficult, if not impossible. For example, the icons of Christ Enthroned and Our Lady of Vladimir are in a glass case in the Treasury, and the icon of Our Lady of Bec is above a doorway. In an information sheet written by one of the vergers, the icon of Christ in Glory (situated in a roped-off area at the back of the Jesus Chapel) is equivocally described as 'attractive but alien', and yet the presence of the icons at all suggests a significant re-evaluation of the role of art in the Anglican context. In conversation, the Canon Librarian, Christopher Irvine, described the icons at Canterbury as theological memorials, which call to mind particular people and events as an aid to prayer. They are useful in the same way that a photograph might be useful in provoking a memory, but the physical location of the icons proscribes any outward movement of aesthetic veneration. Used in this way, they are potentially acceptable to those in the Protestant tradition of Anglicanism.

<sup>156</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 93.

<sup>157</sup> Michelle Brown, *The Lion Companion to Christian Art* (Oxford: Lion Books) 2008, 354.

<sup>158</sup> The icons are; The Annunciation, St Nicholas, Our Lady of Bec, SS Gregory and Augustine, Christ in Glory, Our Lady of Vladimir, Christ Enthroned, and The Melanesian Martyrs.

In summary, although they have completely opposite responses, Protestantism and Orthodoxy share similar concerns in their critique of Western religious art. A negative relationship between aesthetics and faith is embodied in the historic formularies of the Church of England and therefore cannot be ignored, but Orthodox aesthetics potentially provide an alternative model by which it can reassess and renegotiate its theology of the image. The icon, as an entirely different paradigm of artistic representation, has the potential to resolve the central theological issue of transcendence.

### Beauty

For Herbert, the Church of England's aesthetic *via media* was the perfection of beauty, lying between the 'Outlandish looks' of Roman Catholicism and Calvinism that is 'so shy / Of dressing' that it 'nothing wears'.<sup>159</sup> This middle way involved a modicum of decoration, within strict limits of restraint and simplicity both in the subject and quantity of imagery. John of Damascus also praises the aesthetic *via media*, describing the icon as 'pursuing a middle way' between the heretical minimalism of iconoclasm and the excesses of uncontrolled iconographic proliferation.<sup>160</sup> Although Herbert and John understood the parameters of the *via media* differently, they shared an interest in beauty as an expression of theology.

Beauty is an important theme in Orthodox theology, and is a theological principle of soteriological and revelatory importance. It has been described as an 'integral part of the faith',<sup>161</sup> with icons as its principal expression. Indeed, icons are virtually synonymous with the Orthodox understanding of aesthetic beauty. This link is evident in Evdokimov's book on icons, subtitled 'A theology of beauty'. Ouspensky says that 'the beauty of the icon is spiritual beauty'<sup>162</sup> – it is the beauty of heaven made visible by the Incarnation of Christ who is the 'the image of the invisible God'.<sup>163</sup> To look at an icon therefore is to

<sup>159</sup> From *The British Church*, Di Cesare, 44.

<sup>160</sup> John, *Treatises*, 81.

<sup>161</sup> John Baggeley, *Doors of Perception: Icons and their Spiritual Significance* (London: Mowbray) 1987, 88.

<sup>162</sup> Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol I, 184.

<sup>163</sup> Colossians 1.15

look upon the beauty of God as manifested in Christ. Icons of saints and angels share in and reflect that Incarnational beauty because God has transfigured them after the image of his Son.

In almost total contrast to this Orthodox metaphysics of beauty, the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* likens aesthetically pleasing images to 'spiritual harlots' which 'shining with outward beauty and glory ... may please the foolish fantasy of fond lovers'.<sup>164</sup> The sensual gratification provided by the aesthetic – to use Aquinas' phrase, 'the beautiful which being seen pleases'<sup>165</sup> – is understood as leading directly away from God. The spiritual epistemology of Protestantism exhibited by the *Homily* represents a definite strand of anti-iconic and indeed anti-aesthetic theology in the sixteenth-century Church of England. However, others such as Richard Hooker dissented from the total theological negation of beauty. In *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, Hooker argues that churches should be 'suteble decent and fit'<sup>166</sup> as a reflection of the greatness of God and also because 'we outwardly honor with the chiefest of outward things'.<sup>167</sup> Viewed in this way, the decoration of churches was a legitimate expression of an inward disposition of love for God.

This provided a theological basis upon which to argue against absolute Protestant simplicity in the Church of England and this was employed in the opening decades of the seventeenth century by Laud and his followers who developed a new theological aesthetic based on the principle of the beauty of holiness. Laudian decorative aesthetics successfully challenged and expanded the boundaries of acceptable décor and imagery in the Church of England. Beauty was a key theological concept for Laud, who understood the aesthetic *via media* of the Church of England in a much broader and more exuberant spirit than Herbert. His theology of worship required that ecclesial space should be decorated to reflect the majesty of God, evoking a sense of awe and reverence. This reverential approach reconnected the Church

<sup>164</sup> *Homilies*, 169.

<sup>165</sup> 'Pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent.' Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.5.4.1 (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode) 1963.

<sup>166</sup> Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, vol II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) 1977, 5.15.17, p. 57.

<sup>167</sup> Hooker, *Lawes*, 5.15.19, p. 59.

of England with the aesthetic imagination and encouraged a positive attitude to the image and to decoration as a source of instruction and stimulant to devotion. Along with the chapel of Magdalen College, Oxford, the chapel of Peterhouse in Cambridge (consecrated 1632) exemplified the Laudian reverential aesthetic of beauty. It was sumptuously decorated with literally dozens of carved angels,<sup>168</sup> the windows were filled with stained glass, and between them hung tapestries of the life of Christ. There were even statues – four on the inside of the Evangelists and two on the outside of the Virgin Mary and St Peter. This was certainly not uncontroversial, as Laudianism 'flew in the face of the iconoclastic, indeed iconophobic temper of English Protestantism'.<sup>169</sup> How then did Laud negotiate the prohibition of imagery and decoration in the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry*? In his speech in support of imagery mentioned above, Laud played down the *Homily*, which he caustically described as 'so much magnified'.<sup>170</sup> Generally speaking, it was 'easier to ignore than argue against'<sup>171</sup> such texts, and this was for a time a successful tactic.

Laud's theological emphasis on beauty was a significant reinterpretation of the aesthetic tradition of the Church of England, and it re-emerged in nineteenth century through the Oxford Movement. Laud re-associated beauty with God, and asserted that divine beauty could be reflected in the decoration of ecclesial space even through figural images. Aesthetic beauty as the reflection of a divine attribute had epistemological value and therefore could lead the individual into a closer relationship with God. Only because of Laud could the late seventeenth-century Bishop of Ely Simon Patrick (1626-1707) say, 'While we live in this region of mortality, we must make use of such external helps and recommend religion to the people by those orna-

<sup>168</sup> The Puritan iconoclast William Dowling comments that at Peterhouse chapel in 1643 he and others 'pulled down two mighty great angels with wings and diverse other angels ... and about a hundred cherubim and angels'. Quoted in Davies, *Worship & Theology*, 38.

<sup>169</sup> Kenneth Fincham, *The Early Stuart Church 1603-1642*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan) 1993, 173.

<sup>170</sup> Laud, *Works*, 18.

<sup>171</sup> Graham Parry, *Glory, Laud & Honour: The Arts of the Anglican Counter-Reformation* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press) 2006, 8.



ments which the Church according to her prudence thought fittest for those ends'.<sup>172</sup>

This analogic understanding of aesthetics is not dissimilar to one of the Patristic rationales for the use of images. Pseudo-Dionysius wrote in the late fifth or early sixth century that 'using matter, one may be lifted up to the immaterial archetypes' and that 'the appearances of beauty are signs of invisible loveliness'.<sup>173</sup> Orthodoxy inherits this view of beauty as facilitating an encounter with the divine, and for Evdokimov 'God robes himself in beauty and makes it the meeting place of our encounter with him'.<sup>174</sup> The significance of the Laudian beauty of holiness is that it provides a theological framework for the acceptance of the aesthetics of the icon in the context of the Church of England.

#### *'Evangelical beauty'*

If aesthetics is a means by which God can be known, then art can be used as a form of mission – what Aidan Nichols OP has termed 'evangelical beauty'.<sup>175</sup> Of course, the evangelical potential of aesthetics is well known to Orthodoxy. The liturgy for the Triumph of Orthodoxy (first Sunday of Lent) says that 'we proclaim and confess our salvation in word and image',<sup>176</sup> and the feast is a celebration of the role of icons in the life of the Church. In contrast, the Protestant reformers completely denied the soteriological, revelatory and evangelical possibilities of aesthetics. Karlstadt, one of the most extreme iconoclasts of the Reformation, said of images that Christians 'may learn nothing of salvation from them'.<sup>177</sup> Although Laudianism re-forged the theological link between beauty and divinity in the Church of England, it was not until the nineteenth century that Anglo-Catholics explicitly linked aesthetics with evangelism. One of their number, Frederick Little-  
dale, in an article entitled *The Missionary Aspect of Ritualism* argued

<sup>172</sup> Chartres, *The Icon Tradition*, 4.

<sup>173</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press) 1987, 152, 146.

<sup>174</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 210.

<sup>175</sup> Aidan Nichols *Redeeming Beauty: Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics* (Aldershot: Ashgate) 2007, 3.

<sup>176</sup> From the *Kontakion* of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, quoted in Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol I, 151.

<sup>177</sup> Karlstadt, On the Abolition of Images, in *A Reformation Debate: Karlstadt, Emsser & Eck on Sacred Images* (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions) 1991, 25.

that the aesthetics of visual ceremonial satisfy natural human 'cravings for the beautiful'.<sup>178</sup> He likened the need for aesthetic evangelism in his own time with that of the sixth century when Augustine's mission arrived in England:

'That great man knew that much of his future prospect of success depended on the first impression ... The monastic community advanced in solemn procession, headed by the bearer of a silver Cross, after whom came one who bore aloft a painting of the redeemer, glowing with gold and colour'.<sup>179</sup>

The Church's need for evangelism, identified by Littledale in the nineteenth century, is even more urgent in an age of declining church involvement, and the sensitivity of our culture to the image potentially makes icons an appropriate tool for evangelism. The Church of England has recently begun to appreciate and utilise the missional possibilities of aesthetics. The Chapter of Liverpool Cathedral in their *Statement on Mission & Ministry* (2002) describes art as a 'means of evangelism'.<sup>180</sup> At Rochester Cathedral the Byzantine-style fresco of St Augustine baptising King Aethelbert of Kent (Sergei Federov, dedicated 2004) serves 'both as a visual aid and a non-verbal tool of mission'.<sup>181</sup> There has been a realisation that art is an opportunity to communicate the Christian faith to the millions who visit churches every year, and the increase in the use of icons appears to be, in part, a consequence of this realisation. Moreover, icons in particular appear to answer the need for an appropriate means to communicate with a visual and secularised society that is often circumspect about religion and that has largely lost the language of Christian discourse. A document produced by the Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral comments on the ability of the icon 'to speak the mysteries of faith ... It invites engagement, but it does so with a discreet sensitivity'.<sup>182</sup> If Reformation

<sup>178</sup> Frederick Littledale, 'The Missionary Aspect of Ritualism', in *The Church and the World: Essays on Questions of the Day* (London: Longmans) 1866, 37.

<sup>179</sup> Littledale, 'The Missionary Aspect of Ritualism', 46.

<sup>180</sup> Tom Devonshire-Jones & Graham Howes, *English Cathedrals & the Visual Arts* (London: Art & Christian Enquiry) 2005, 23.

<sup>181</sup> Devonshire-Jones, *English Cathedrals*, 20.

<sup>182</sup> *Speaking of the Mysteries of Faith* (London: St Paul's Cathedral), 8.

iconoclasm was symptomatic of the paradigm shift from the visual to the verbal, then the current popularity of icons is evidence of the reversion of this paradigm and the primacy of the image over the word once more. This has been recognised by both Anglicans and Orthodox:

In our time, when visual imagery plays a more important part in people's lives, the tradition of icons has acquired a startling relevance. It presents the Church with a new possibility of proclaiming the Gospel in a society in which language is often devalued.<sup>183</sup>

Today's situation gives the catechetical rationale for icons a renewed force. Gregory the Great famously commented that 'a picture is provided in churches for the reason that those who are illiterate may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books'.<sup>184</sup> Icons are an ideal medium for the evangelisation of a visual but theologically illiterate age because they are eloquent, beautiful and profound visual representations of theology. Although people are no longer drawn in large numbers to church buildings for worship, it seems that they are still drawn by beauty, and given this situation it seems accurate to say that 'mission is flawed unless it is able to embrace the ministry of the sacred visual artist'.<sup>185</sup> Today, the Church of England must evangelise in a way unparalleled since Augustine arrived at Thanet in 597, and this appears to be an important factor in the renewal of its theological aesthetics in favour of beauty as an expression of the divine.

#### *St Paul's Cathedral*

A current example of the evangelical use of icons is St Paul's Cathedral where, as described in the previous chapter, three icons have recently been installed. The large icons of Christ Pantocrator and the Virgin Eleousa are situated at the west end with candle stands in front of them, while the third of St Paul is positioned beside the High Altar. Canon Martin Warner told me that the Chapter have been conscious

<sup>183</sup> *Dublin*, 41.

<sup>184</sup> Gregory the Great, *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, vol II (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies) 2004, 674.

<sup>185</sup> Walker, *Images or Idols?*, 2.

for some time of the theological aesthetics of the building. The 1997 Report of the Development Group appointed by the Dean and Chapter noted that: 'All buildings speak. How they speak and what they say is partly a function of their essential architecture, partly their furnishing and partly what goes on in them'.<sup>186</sup> Warner spoke of the concern that was felt about the meaning of a building, which has become iconic in itself without any reference to Christianity, and the current icons were commissioned in response to the popularity of two 'trial icons' with visitors. It appears that new icons are having two important effects on the theological aesthetics of the building. The first is what Warner described as an 'evangelical' effect as the icons reaffirm the sacred character of the space, concretising its specifically Christian identity and thereby acting as a corrective to the prevailing sense of secular and historically orientated tourism. The second is a change in the 'spiritual atmosphere' of the building, for as Warner points out, although the grandeur of St Paul's evokes awe it struggles to foster prayer because prayer often requires the human scale. The two icons at the West end are almost life-size and their presence creates a 'pocket' of sacred space that enables private devotion and prayer. Importantly, Warner comments that what has surprised him and others is the extent to which the icons do not seem at all strange or out of place in the context of a baroque Church of England cathedral, but instead are consonant with the dignity, wonder and beauty of the building.

#### *Immanence*

As the example of St Paul's suggests, icons have a role in the creation of sacred space — they are what might be called a form of 'sacral aesthetics'. The main force behind this approach to the arts in the Church of England is the sacramental theology of Anglo-Catholicism, which in the nineteenth century transformed the appearance of churches from preaching boxes to sacrament houses. The decorative arts were used to sacralise ecclesial space according to a theology of divine immanence in the consecrated elements of the Eucharist.

<sup>186</sup> *Speaking of the Mysteries of Faith*, 1.

The Tractarians themselves were not greatly interested in the arts and some, such as Edward Bouverie Pusey, became concerned by the aesthetic changes. He commented that 'there is danger in the very "beauty of holiness" without its severity'.<sup>187</sup> Tractarian theology was the source of a widespread revival of Catholic forms of worship, which was often combined with an existing and growing interest in all things Gothic. Of particular importance in this regard was the Cambridge Camden Society (founded in 1839, renamed The Ecclesiological Society in 1846) and their influential periodical *The Ecclesiologist*, which led the way in not only campaigning for but also implementing aesthetic changes according to Catholic-Gothic principles. Despite disclaiming doctrinal and theological interest, the Society was undoubtedly influenced by the theology of the Oxford Movement and its activities 'fused religious and aesthetic debate'.<sup>188</sup> The Society was neither modest nor inaccurate about the extent of its achievements when it said that, 'We have turned minds upside down as to the outside and general fabric of the church ... and so we have given a new life, a new character, a new significance to the Prayer Book and to the worship of the Church of England'.<sup>189</sup>

The Society gave the idea of 'Anglican simplicity' short shrift, and in particular it opposed what it described as 'grey Protestantism'.<sup>190</sup> Its direct influence is seen at All Saints', Margaret Street in London, which could accurately be described as the apogee of the aesthetic movement in the nineteenth century. Its walls are covered with frescoes and the reredos behind the high altar is filled with dozens of statues in a setting deigned for the celebration of sacramental liturgy. As Geoffrey Rowell points out, 'Gothic architecture was not to be viewed simply aesthetically ... it was itself the outworking of liturgical

<sup>187</sup> From a letter of 1845 quoted in James White, *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1962, 22.

<sup>188</sup> Michael Hall, 'The Rise of Refinement: G F Bodley's All Saints' Cambridge and the Return of English Models in Gothic Architecture', *Architectural History*, 36 (1993), 105.

<sup>189</sup> *The Ecclesiologist*, vol xxv, quoted in White, *The Cambridge Movement*, 183.

<sup>190</sup> *The Ecclesiologist*, vol VI (London: John Masters) 1846, 215.

and theological principles, and an architectural medium that proclaimed a theological message'.<sup>191</sup>

#### *Sacral aesthetics in the Church of England*

One of the central theological messages being proclaimed in the nineteenth century by Anglo-Catholics was an understanding of ecclesial space as sacred space. This view did not emerge out of a vacuum. The post-Reformation Church of England retained a residual sense of ecclesial space as holy — the churches of the Church of England were never *exactly* the same as continental Protestant meeting houses. The *Homily for Repairing, and keeping clean, and comely adorning of churches* says that 'the church or temple is counted and called holy', 'not of itself, but because God's people resorting thereunto are holy, and exercise themselves in holy and heavenly things'.<sup>192</sup> Churches were considered holy because of what happened in them, or as Hooker explained, 'churches receive ... their chiefe perfection from the end whereunto they serve'.<sup>193</sup> Hooker went further than the *Homily* however, and in the *Laws* he articulated a more developed theology of sacred space: 'When therefore we sanctifie or hallowe churches ... we invest God himselve with them, that we sever them from common uses'.<sup>194</sup>

Subsequently, Laud and his followers in the seventeenth century emphasised the church building as inherently holy, and Richard Montague argued not only for the holiness of places but also of objects used in worship, saying that 'some insensible things may be honoured'.<sup>195</sup> However, this Church of England theology of sacred space was almost

<sup>191</sup> Geoffrey Rowell, *The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1983, 101.

<sup>192</sup> *Homilies*, 177.

<sup>193</sup> Hooker, *Laws*, 60.

<sup>194</sup> Hooker, *Laws*, 53.

<sup>195</sup> Montagu, *A Gagg for the New Gospell*, 308. On the ground this was manifested in the consecration of buildings (e.g. St Katharine Cree in 1631) and objects (the communion table of Wolverhampton parish church was consecrated as an 'altar' in 1635). The altar was considered particularly sacred and accordingly it was often railed off and in some places the laity were excluded from this area. See Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship 1547–c.1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2007, 240.

entirely lost in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. John Mason Neale recorded that while officiating at a Baptism in 1842 'the Churchwarden, wanting to open the east window got up on the Altar! Really, the Protestantism of the people with respect to that is dreadful'.<sup>196</sup> However, the theology of sacred space upheld by Anglo-Catholics in the later nineteenth century linked art and worship to an extent that had not been seen in the Church of England since the Reformation. The sacral aesthetics of Anglo-Catholicism included liturgy, decoration, ceremonial, and images, all of which combined to open a window upon 'the vision glorious'<sup>197</sup> of heaven, and accordingly the church building was regarded by many as a place of divine presence. A letter of 1853 to *The Ecclesiologist* declared that

We have been awakened to better things. Bare walls will no longer suffice ... Let the spirit of adoration hover over the building, so that even a Pagan must feel when entering one of our churches, this is not a house, nor a museum, nor a theatre, nor a workshop, nor any common lodging – it is 'DOMUS MANSIONALIS OMNIPOTENTIS DEI'.<sup>198</sup>

#### *Sacral aesthetics and icons*

This aesthetic movement has brought the Church of England into a theological position not dissimilar *in kind* from the theological view of Orthodoxy, which considers the church to be 'God's dwelling place'.<sup>199</sup> It is holy and a 'cosmic centre' not only because of the celebration of the sacraments but also because of the presence of icons which, though silent, participate in the continual praise of heaven. The 'Neo-Orthodox' theology of the icon of the twentieth century, primarily from the Russian cultural sphere, particularly emphasises the sanctifying presence of icons. Evdokimov writes that grace from icons 'shines out'<sup>200</sup> into the space around them to make it holy and that through them the church 'sparkles with the presence of the saints'.<sup>201</sup> It is evident that there are some real correspondences between the Anglo-

<sup>196</sup> Neale, *Letters*, 37.

<sup>197</sup> The title of Rowell's book on the Oxford Movement.

<sup>198</sup> *The Ecclesiologist*, vol XIV (London: John Masters) 1853, 97.

<sup>199</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 150.

<sup>200</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 179.

<sup>201</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 151.

Catholic and Orthodox theology of sacral aesthetics. In particular, both understand the decoration of the church building as having a fundamental role in the sacralisation of space. Augustus Pugin who (although a Roman Catholic) was influential among some Anglicans, expressed this connection between art and the sacred: 'It [the church building] is indeed a sacred place ... the rich and varied hues of the stained windows ... the venerable images of the departed – all alike conspire to fill the mind with veneration for the place and make it feel the sublimity of Christian worship.'<sup>202</sup>

In a similar manner, icons are, with increasing frequency, being used in the Church of England to 'sacralise' a space, and as windows upon divine beauty they provoke awe, evoke a sense of the eternal and engender prayer.

#### *Norwich Cathedral*

Norwich Cathedral is an example of the current use of icons to sacralise space in the Church of England. Unique among English cathedrals, Norwich has an episcopal throne situated behind the High Altar beyond which is an ambulatory. Going into the ambulatory, behind and immediately underneath the cathedra is a recess, in which there is an icon of The Descent into Hades (Patricia Fostiropulos, 1998). It was commissioned under the impetus of the previous Dean, Stephen Platten (now Bishop of Wakefield) who has an interest in Orthodoxy and particularly in icons. This is evident in the carefully chosen and symbolic location which Canon Peter Doll, Canon Librarian, described to me as the deepest, darkest point of the cathedral and entirely appropriate for the subject. The lamp that perpetually burns before it represents Christ as the light shining in the darkness, and the positioning of the icon in a niche designed to hold relics restores the sacral associations of that particular part of the building. Doll observes that almost every day he finds people kneeling in prayer on the prie-dieu in front of the icon and that a great many votive candles are lit daily on the adjacent stand. He comments that many of the cathedral commu-

<sup>202</sup> Augustus Pugin, *Contrasts: or a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Day shewing the Present Decay of Taste* (London: St Marie's Grange) 1836, 2.

nity consider the site to be a particularly sacred because of the presence of this icon.

#### *Sacramental theology and icons*

The restoration of sacral aesthetics in the Church of England is closely linked to the Oxford Movement's recovery of sacramental theology, and this presents another point of connection with Orthodoxy. Icons are images that mediate the divine and thus they naturally fit into a sacramental interpretation of Christianity, where material things and physical symbols are the focus for interaction between God and the world and the locus for the operation of grace. Evdokimov even says that 'the icon is a sacrament' because 'it is the vehicle of a personal presence'.<sup>203</sup> Likewise Bulgakov writes that 'the icon gives the real feeling of the presence of God',<sup>204</sup> and 'an icon is a place of gracious presence'.<sup>205</sup> This is not to say that the nature of 'presence' in icons and the sacraments is the same. Evdokimov is careful to differentiate the *substantial* communion of the Eucharist from iconographic communion, which is *spiritual* and a 'meeting in prayer'.<sup>206</sup> He comments that the sacramental presence of icons is that of personality rather than hypostatic: 'The icon does not have any existence in itself ... the [hypostatic] presence in no way incarnates itself in the icon'.<sup>207</sup> Outside of devotional interaction and prayerful engagement an icon is essentially 'only a wooden board', but through prayer it becomes 'a structure through which the Other shines forth'<sup>208</sup> – and this mediation of divine grace makes them holy.

As has been described above, there already exists a sacramental understanding of aesthetics in the Church of England, especially among Anglo-Catholics. In discussing the icons commissioned for Worcester College Chapel, Oxford (Patricia Fostiropoulos, 2001), Peter Doll defines the relationship between art and sacramental spirituality thus:

<sup>203</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 178.

<sup>204</sup> Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 161.

<sup>205</sup> Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 162.

<sup>206</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 195.

<sup>207</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 196.

<sup>208</sup> Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 178.

'The sacramental teaching of the Church reminds us that as God became part of his creation in Christ, so he can still be conveyed to us through created matter, be it the water of Baptism, the bread and wine of the Eucharist, or the created image. God is accessible to us through all our senses, through our eyes beholding creation or an icon as much as through hearing the Word of God proclaimed in Scripture'.<sup>209</sup>

Similarly, Louth notes that 'icons have appeared in many Western churches ... sometimes indeed in the same chapel set aside for prayer where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved'.<sup>210</sup> The link between icons and sacramental theology is evident at St Peter's, Eaton Square, an Anglo-Catholic parish in London, which commissioned its new icon of the crucifixion (Silvia Dimitrova, 2009) for use in the veneration of the cross on Good Friday. There is clearly a theological correspondence between the veneration of this icon with genuflection and kissing and similar reverence shown to the body and blood of Christ under the form of bread and wine in the Eucharist. Sacramental language has also been applied to the *Way of Life* sculpture at Ely Cathedral (dedicated 2001) by the theologian Jeremy Begbie, who describes the sacramental nature of this artwork not in terms of 'static presence' but as 'the active and dynamic presence of God in movement through matter'.<sup>211</sup> The sacramental quality of this artwork resides not in any sort of holiness inherent to its physical substance but in its ability to facilitate and mediate a relationship with the divine through its material form. Understood in this way, Begbie says that art can be described as *acting* sacramentally, rather than *being* a sacrament as such. This closely resembles Evdokimov's description of the sacramental nature of icons and demonstrates the extent to which Orthodox theological aesthetics of the icon accord with some aspects of sacramental theology in the Church of England.

<sup>209</sup> Peter Doll, 'The Chapel Fabric: Chapel Iconography', in *Worcester College Record*, 2003, 36.

<sup>210</sup> Louth, *An Invasion of Icons*, 2.

<sup>211</sup> Begbie, *Sounding the Depths*, 155.

### The Aesthetics of the Icon

The shift in theological aesthetics brought about by the Oxford Movement enabled the widespread use of images in the Church of England. However, there are other factors that have brought about the particular appreciation and popularity of icons – an art form that for centuries was considered strange and crude. Such a view of iconography is found in Thomas Smith's *Account of the Greek Church* (published 1680) in which he describes icons as being 'without beauty or proportion'.<sup>212</sup> Even William Palmer, a nineteenth-century admirer of Orthodoxy,<sup>213</sup> was rather mixed in his appreciation, describing his impression of the devotion shown to icons as one of 'wonder, curiosity, suspicion and a certain repugnance'.<sup>214</sup> Before the twentieth century, almost no member of the Church of England, other than perhaps John Mason Neale, expressed an unqualified attraction to the aesthetic style of icons.<sup>215</sup>

Perhaps the most important factor in the widespread appreciation of the icon in contemporary England has been the numerous and increasing number of exhibitions, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century. These exhibitions have educated the public in the aesthetics of the icon, and their success has almost certainly contributed to the current popularity of icons in the Church of England. One of the earliest exhibitions, *Ancient Russian Icons*, took place in 1929, but it was almost thirty years until icons were displayed again in the 1959 Victoria & Albert Museum's *Masterpieces of Byzantine Art*. That same year the Temple Gallery was founded as a permanent gallery (and dealer) in Russian icons. Then followed a twenty-year gap in exhibitions until the Courtauld Gallery's *Icons from Bulgaria* in 1978. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, there has been a marked rise

<sup>212</sup> Smith, *An Account*, 63.

<sup>213</sup> Palmer even sought admission to the Greek Orthodox Church in 1853, but was not accepted because he refused to be rebaptised. He later became a Roman Catholic in 1855.

<sup>214</sup> Palmer, *Notes of a Visit*, 41.

<sup>215</sup> See the comment made by Neale about icons in chapter 1.

in both the number and popularity of exhibitions. These have included *Icons in Oxford* at Christ Church Picture Gallery in 1980, and *From Byzantium to El Greco: Greek Frescoes and Icons* at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in 1987. The 1994 Royal Academy exhibition *Gates of Mystery: The Art of Holy Russia* was remarkably successful and following on from this the British Museum put on *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections* in 1995. Since then the number of icon exhibitions has risen beyond reasonable counting, but notable among them have been *Sinai, Byzantium and Russia* at the Courtauld Gallery in 2001, *Richness & Diversity* at All Hallows by the Tower, London, in 2006, and *Epiphany: Contemporary Iconographers in Britain* at the Wallspace Gallery in 2007. The Royal Academy recently concluded its major exhibition *Byzantium*, which included a large number of icons. Although this list is far from exhaustive, I have described this trend in some detail because the noticeable rise in the number of exhibitions is indicative of a genuine interest in icons, of which exhibitions are both a symptom and an agent of widespread popularity.

There are also two practical aspects – one technical and the other political – relating to the contemporary popularity of icons. Technical advances in cleaning, restoration and display methods means that 'we can see paint surfaces [today] in all their brightness and subtlety',<sup>216</sup> and thus appreciate icons as never before. Additionally, although the rise of Communism and the resulting Orthodox diaspora did much to make icons known in the West, the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe has been equally significant in this regard as not only are icons now accessible to travellers to those countries, but it is also much easier for museums to borrow icons for exhibition. Combined with these practical factors however is a genuine reawakening of interest in the arts in the Church of England in the twentieth century – and one that continues to gather momentum today. George Bell (consecrated Bishop of Chichester, 1929) is well known as one of the foremost exponents of the reintegration of the arts with worship in the Church of England. In his enthronement address Bell made this plea:

<sup>216</sup> Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds* (London: Reaktion Books) 1997, 22.

'Whether it be music or painting or drama, sculpture or architecture or any other form of art, there is an instinctive sympathy between all of these and the worship of God ... therefore I earnestly hope that in this diocese (and in others) we may seek ways and means for a re-association of the Artist and the Church ... considering with his help our conception alike of the character of Christian worship and of the forms in which Christian teaching may be proclaimed'.<sup>217</sup>

More recently, the organisation Art and Christian Enquiry (founded 1991) has encouraged the use of art in churches through various ways such as its bulletin, conferences and annual awards. Its former director, Tom Devonshire-Jones commented in 2005 that 'in the last fifteen years or so, the churches can be said to have rediscovered art'.<sup>218</sup> In light of this, the icon appears to represent a new phase in a long-term movement towards the reintegration of art and worship in the Church of England. However, the icon is not always used with appropriate prudence. In many churches icons are being used merely as attractive but uncontroversial images, poorly sited and without theological consideration. It is perhaps with this in mind that Bishop Kallistos Ware comments that 'icons...are not mere ornaments designed to make the church "look nice", but have a theological and liturgical function to fulfil'.<sup>219</sup> Similarly, the *Dublin Agreed Statement* affirms that icons for Anglicans and Orthodox alike are 'not a random decoration, but an integral part of the Church's life and worship'.<sup>220</sup> While this study seeks to commend the use of the icon within the Church of England, this should not be done indiscriminately, nor should there be a 'refuge in icons, sensing here a safe and hallowed solution'.<sup>221</sup> Neither should the presence of the icon be to the detriment of other forms of art – especially abstract and installation works – which its popularity sometimes threatens to diminish. Instead, icons in the Church of England must be integrated into the theological aes-

<sup>217</sup> Quoted in Walker, *Images or Idols?*, 49.

<sup>218</sup> Devonshire-Jones, *English Cathedrals*, 1.

<sup>219</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 27.

<sup>220</sup> *Dublin*, 41.

<sup>221</sup> Devonshire-Jones, *English Cathedrals*, 1.

thetics of its buildings in order to draw the viewer into a closer relationship with God.

### Conclusion

Through the triple lenses of prayer, liturgy and aesthetics, I have examined the impact of the presence and use of icons on the Church of England's theology of images. By tracing the history of the reception of the icon theology of Nicaea II, it has been possible to discern a consistent weakening of the influence of anti-iconic Protestant theology on the Church of England from the sixteenth century onwards. It is evident that the Laudianism of the seventeenth century, with its principle of the beauty of holiness, was the beginning of a process in favour of images as an aid to prayer that later found expression in the devotional use of images among Anglo-Catholics in the nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, in valuing the role of images as an aid and even as a medium of prayer, both these movements have helped to create the theological preconditions for the veneration of the icon in the contemporary Church of England, which relies upon a mediatory approach to the material. The extent to which the Church of England has today reassessed and accepted almost all the icon theology of Nicaea II, at least at an institutional level, is demonstrated by the results of the ecumenical discussions that have taken place in the last century which exhibit remarkable theological agreement with regard to images. The current popularity of icons among a significant minority of Anglicans appears to be a manifestation of this agreement, and is suggestive of a profound modification of the spiritual metaphysics of piety that the English Church accepted at the Reformation.

Anglicans today are not only praying with icons, but also blessing them, while the text of various liturgies of blessing underscores the acceptance of the Nicene icon theology mentioned above. I have argued that the value placed on visual ritual and ceremonial in *The Book of Common Prayer* means that the icon, a fundamentally liturgical art form, is not necessarily opposed to the liturgical tradition of the Church of England. Icons can be located within the remit of the prayer book's triple rationale of order, edification and recollection as the fundamental principles of worship in the Church of England. Furthermore, I

have shown that modern liturgy is playing a key role in creating propitious theological conditions for icons in the Church of England. The recent liturgies of *Common Worship* are no longer subject to the inherited Western mistranslation and misunderstanding of Nicaea II that is reflected in the anti-iconic language of *The Book of Common Prayer*, indeed icons are even occasionally recommended. Most importantly however, *Common Worship* shifts the underlying conceptual grammar of the Church of England's liturgy in favour of icons through a greater emphasis on the Incarnation, which is the theological basis for iconography. The integration of icons into the liturgy is an important step in their appropriation on a permanent basis in the life and worship of the Church of England. In some places this has already begun to happen, and icons are acquiring uses and meanings that are unique to the Anglican context.

The integration of the icon into the Church of England is also seen in the field of ecclesial aesthetics. Despite the shifting parameters of the Church of England's aesthetic *via media*, there are persistent themes that are potentially consistent with the theological aesthetics of the icon. As semi-abstract images that depict the world transfigured by the transcendent reality of heaven, the icon potentially resolves and thereby overcomes the Protestant objection to images that is based on a concern regarding the idolatrous realism of images. The doctrinal framework of the iconographic tradition also goes some way to safeguarding against the visual expression of inappropriate or heterodox theology. As an art form that seeks to reflect the beauty of God as seen in the Incarnation, the theological aesthetics of the icon resonates with the Laudian reverential aesthetic of beauty in worship that was amplified by Anglo-Catholicism. This has particular relevance in the modern age when the 'evangelical beauty' of the icon is a means by which the attribute of divine beauty can be recaptured and utilised as a form of mission in a secular and highly visual age. Moreover, the understanding of the icon in quasi-sacramental terms as a channel of grace accords with the sacramental theology and aesthetics of Anglo-Catholicism. It appears that the current use of the icon may be spreading an understanding of art as playing a part in the sacralisation of space. The presence of the icon is also symptomatic of a trend towards the reintegration of the arts with worship to an extent where the rela-

tionship between them is at least positive, and perhaps even essential for theology in the Church of England.

The presence and use of the icon in the Church of England has numerous overlapping implications for Anglican theology of the image, and the central theme that arises is the doctrine of the Incarnation. This can be seen in the acceptance of the Nicene justification of images, and it is also present in the liturgical shift of *Common Worship*, which gives a new prominence to the Incarnation by balancing the Paschal and Christmas cycles of worship. Moreover, the recovery of a theological aesthetic that gives value to the material, the beautiful and the immanent are all hallmarks of a stronger incarnational theology. The icon is, I suspect, as much a symptom as a cause of this trend, but its current popularity and presence must surely indicate a greater emphasis on the Incarnation in the theology of the Church of England. There is undoubtedly more work to be done in unpacking the theological implications of the icon in the Church of England before it will be possible to articulate further what an 'Anglican' theology of icons might eventually look like. However, in this way it may even be possible to reclaim the 'image of Our Lord and Saviour painted on a board' alongside the cross that Augustine and his monks brought with them when they founded the English Church.