

Iconography Bibliography

An important aspect of Eastern Christianities proclamation of the Gospel is found in its reliance on icons. Icons are not mere pictures, but indispensable articles in the Church's life. In the East the goal of sacred art is more complex than simple representation. Icons of Christ, for example, attempt to bring out the divine nature. For this reason the images are idealized with supra-natural characteristics such as large eyes, nose and hands. These exaggerations are meant to express the union of the two natures of Christ.

Icons have been referred to as prayers, hymns, sermons in form and color. They are the visual Gospel. Since the eastern understanding of the Gospel is concerned with theosis the icons of Christ and the Saints also share this concern. If the icon is of Christ it reflects the reality that God became man, the Incarnation, and restored God's image in man. Icons of the saints show their openness to the Holy Spirit and through the use of the same kind of exaggerations depicts them as they are in heaven, deified.

The Church Edifice is constructed as a "mini- universe". The ceiling depicts heaven: on it is an icon of Christ Pantocrator, (i.e., the all-ruling Christ). This is symbolic of Christ looking down from heaven upon the congregation, hearing and receiving their prayers. The remaining part of the ceiling and walls of an eastern church are usually decorated with icons that illustrate the redemption of the world. The apostles, confessors, martyrs and saints are pictured representing the church triumphant.

A large icon of the Enthroned Theotokos (Kyriotissa Icon) is usually depicted above the holy altar on the eastern apse. The purpose of this icon is for the worshippers to recall the Incarnation. The Theotokos presents her Son to the worshippers below.

The Iconostasis or icon screen separates the nave from the altar. It symbolizes the temple veil in the Old Testament, which separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. On the screen are icons of Christ, Mary, and various other saints. The top row, or "second tier" of icons depict the major scenes in the life of our Lord and Lady. During the service the priest censes first the icons and then the entire congregation. He does this because we too are images or living icons of Christ.

Here are a some Bibliographical Resources if you are interested in learning more about Icons:

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