

Icon and Ethics

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The perception that »Icon« and »Ethics« have little if anything to do with each other, I am sure reflects a broad and general perspective widespread both inside and outside the Orthodox Church today.¹ For many, the relationship between the two would appear to be non-existent and such persons would unabashedly question the possibility that any significant connection between the two could be found at all. Others might be intrigued by the concept, yet suggest that it might be a strain on one's creativity to formulate any connection between the icon and ethics.

What I propose to do in this paper is, first, to minimize my »creativity«, as much as possible by examining the sources of the Orthodox tradition in regard to icons and ethics to see if a relationship does exist between them in the tradition's theological and historical contexts. Secondly, assuming that such a tradition exists, I want to make some suggestions as to why a »forgetfulness« of that tradition has occurred both within the Orthodox tradition and outside of it, and to suggest the need for it to be reclaimed for our times. Finally, I *will* use some imagination in drawing out some ethical axioms from the icon, and in proposing concrete ways by which icon and ethics may serve each other in contemporary ethical teaching and church life.

I. Ethics and Icons in the Eastern Christian Tradition

Is there a connection between the icon as it is understood in Eastern Christian tradition and its ethical teaching? One of the presuppositions required to answer the question is the need to recognize the complexity of the development of the Orthodox theology of the icon as it faced various trends and emphases in the counter-development of the iconoclastic theological tradition.

It might be helpful to very briefly outline the history of the controversy regarding icons in the 8th century in the Byzantine Empire, and to briefly define the approach to ethics and the foundational theological tradition of Orthodoxy concerning icons at the beginning of this paper for the sake of providing a general context of the discussion which is to follow. In addition, note will have to be taken of various kinds of theological positions in the iconoclastic controversy so as to understand the history of the relationship of ethics and the icon.

¹ A first draft of this paper was read at the Annual Meeting of the Orthodox Theological Society in America, May 28–30, 1987. A number of the suggestions made by my colleagues at that time have been incorporated in this revision. This form of the paper was presented at the 1989 Annual Meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics, which met at Notre Dame, in January.

1. *The Iconoclastic Controversy*²

For most Eastern Orthodox theologians and historians of the iconoclastic controversy, the issue regarding the use or the abolishment of icons was always much more than a difference of interpretation of the commandment regarding idols. The iconodules, i. e., the venerator of icons saw in the icons a theological affirmation of Orthodox truth, while the iconoclasts, i. e., literally, the icon smashers, were motivated by suspicions that any art with a religious subject was suspect and dangerous. What was an affirmation of the creation and the incarnation for the first, was a return to idolatry for the second. Some see an inordinate Moslem influence on the iconoclasts, while others discern an inordinate Greek pagan influence on the iconodules. Most are agreed that the iconoclastic controversy involved much more than these influences: it at heart was a dispute not primarily about art, but about »the character of Christ's human nature, the Christian attitude towards matter, the true meaning of Christian redemption,« in the characterization of Bishop Ware.³

The controversy began in 726 when Emperor Leo III began his attack on the icons. It ended 120 years later when in 843, Empress Theodora restored the icons, in what has since come to be called the »Triumph of Orthodoxy,« celebrated annually in Orthodox Churches on the first Sunday of Great Lent as the »Sunday of Orthodoxy.« Between those two dates two phases of the controversy were played out.

The end of the first period of controversy was what is now known as the 7th Ecumenical Council (also, as 2nd Nicaea) which in 787 proclaimed a doctrine of icons which has become normative for the Orthodox Church.

Icons serve both as teaching devices for the unlettered and as »windows on heaven,« concrete embodiments of the incarnational and transfiguring truths of the Christian faith. In honoring the icon, the honor is passed on to the prototype, therefore it is in no way perceived to have anything to do with idolatry. The form of the icon is not designed to portray the concrete this-worldly fallen and distorted empirical created reality. Rather, it seeks to convey the fulfilled and transfigured eschatological reality of the heavenly kingdom. This explains the unusual draftsman-ship, such as the inverted perspective, the prominence of the open eyes in saintly figures, the lavish use gold and other precious metals, and a stylized method of depiction. In the West, Eastern Christian iconography was widely misunderstood until the advent of modern art. The insights of this new approach which rejected decadent photographic art, paradoxically provoked new appreciation for the Eastern Christian icon.

However, during the eighth and ninth centuries, in the process of defending the icons, Orthodox writers developed varying theological perspectives in accordance to the kind of opposition they faced from the iconoclasts. Thus, there were differing, though not contradictory nor mutually exclusive, theologies of the icon developed. Certain of these theological streams can provide light on the issue of the relationship of the icon to ethics.

² These quite elementary descriptions are drawn primarily from the account in *Timothy Ware*, *The Orthodox Church*. New York: Penguin Books, 1981, pp.38–40, to which the reader is referred for more details as background to this paper.

³ *Ware*, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

Other theological perspectives developed by the iconophiles were not so conducive to an ethical approach to icons.

There remains the task of briefly defining the terms, »Ethics« and »Icon« as they are understood and used in this paper.

2. Ethics

When we speak of Christian Ethics we speak of that aspect of the Christian Faith which articulates its normative, »ought« dimension. We are referring to those aspects of the Orthodox tradition which make claims on the will, the choosing ability human beings have, based in the »self-determining freedom« of our human nature, and in particular, the Christian believer.

Though Orthodox Christians do not often focus on the normative dimensions of their Faith, when such attention is given, almost every dimension of Orthodoxy reveals that some aspect of ethics is present. The direction and guidance, the commandments and rules, the prescriptions and the proscriptions which are integral parts of the Christian tradition are the specific content of its ethical tradition. In Orthodox Christianity, these normative statements are embodied in Scripture, in the patristic exegesis of Scripture, the larger patristic and conciliar tradition, the canons, the monastic *typika* and the tradition of spiritual exercise (*ἄσκησις* and *ἀγών*), the sermonic tradition, the prayer tradition, the liturgy and worship, even the architecture of the church structure.⁴

Doctrinally, this normative »ought« is rooted in the beliefs of Orthodoxy in the Trinitarian nature of God, in the creation of humanity in the image and likeness of God, in the fallen condition of humanity, in the restoration of the image and the call to its fulfillment in the »likeness,« in short, the renewal in freedom of the human God-likeness, in deification. This goal of human life is approached in a multiplicity of ways: theological, sacramental, liturgical, spiritual, but also ethical.⁵

As Vladimir Lossky put it, »To be the image of God, the Fathers affirm, in the last analysis is to be a personal being, that is, to say, a free responsible being. Why, one may ask, did God create man free and responsible? Precisely because He wanted to call him to a supreme vocation: deification; that is to say, to become by grace ... as God. And this call demands a free response. ... «⁶ Elsewhere, Lossky points to the eschatological truth that the »realization of the last end, by the grace of the Holy Spirit and by human freedom, is the inner mystery of the Church ... The mystery of deification which is being fulfilled in the Church is eschatology at work ... «⁷. One could take this apt phrase and say that for Orthodoxy, ethics (i.e., the normative dimension of the faith), is »eschatology at work,« i.e., realizing the »Kingdom life« in the here and now.

⁴ Stanley S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life: The Theoria of Eastern Orthodox Ethics*. Minneapolis: Light & Life Publishing Co., 1983, ch. 1.

⁵ Harakas, *Op.cit.*, ch. 2.

⁶ Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978, pp. 71–72.

⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*. Eds. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974, p. 224.

Though it affirms and uses rules, commandments, proscriptions and prescriptions, Orthodox Ethics has little in common with the autonomous Kantian ethics of traditional Protestantism, nor the naturalistic »probablism« of classic Roman Catholicism; and though there is a strong affirmation of human freedom in its teaching, Orthodox Ethics has little in common to the existentialist subjectivism of much of present day Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.⁸

3. Icons

Numerous themes are discussed by all the theologians and historians of the iconoclastic controversy: the icon as witness and embodiment of the transfiguration of matter; the redemption of creation; and icons as witnesses to the divinized, eschatological, transfigured reality.⁹ While one side of the theological discussion of the icon seeks to interpret the icon as a pointer God-ward, as a vision of the transfigured cosmos in its form and purpose, another trend in iconologic theology has looked the other way, in terms of the impact of the icon on the believer, and the message imparted to the person who gazes upon the icon. Of course, the two are connected and relate to each other intimately. But the former emphasis is the most dominant. Few Orthodox theologians today concern themselves very much with the dimension of the icon relationship to the believer.

Among these, probably no one has articulated this more fully than has Dumitru Staniloae, the Romanian Orthodox systematic theologian in his remarkable chapter »Revelation Through Acts, Words, and Images.«¹⁰ Responding to recent developments in biblical theology regarding the revelatory character of the Holy Scriptures, Staniloae, as he speaks of revelation through images, recognizes the contingent character of specific images, but also points to what he calls the »objective core« of the image, which is apprehended in part in a »non-subjective« way, serving to mold the whole person who observes it.

As an image, the icon is presented by Staniloae as having this kind of impress and influence upon the believer. In fact, precisely as icon and not mere picture, the icon is seen as serving a purpose of formation, not based on subjective emotions or imaginations, but

⁸ See *Sergius Bulgakov*, *The Orthodox Church*. Hialeah, FL: Orthodox Book Center, 1935, p. 179, and *Stanley S. Harakas*, *Towards Transfigured Life*, pp. 136–141.

⁹ For various treatments of the icon in its historical and theological contexts, see, in the order of increasing complexity and depth, the following representative works: *Ernst Benz*, *The Eastern Orthodox Church*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1963, ch. 1; *Manolis Chatzidakis & André Grabar*, *Byzantine and Early Medieval Painting*. Trans. Simon Watson Taylor. New York: Viking Press, 1965; *Nicholas V. Lossky*, *The Significance of Second Nicaea*. *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987) 335–340; *Robert M. Arida*, *Second Nicaea: The Vision of the New Man and New Creation in the Orthodox Icon*. *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987) 417–424; *Boris Bobrinskoy*, *The Icon: Sacrament of the Kingdom*. *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 31 (1987) 287–296; *Nicholas Ozolin*, *The Theology of the Icon*. *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 31 (1987) 297–308; *Leonid Ouspensky*, *Iconography of the Descent of the Holy Spirit*. *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 31 (1987) 309–348; *Daniel J. Sahas*, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986; *Constantine D. Kalokyris*, *The Essence of Orthodox Iconography*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1985; *Leonid Ouspensky*, *Theology of the Icon*. Trans. *Elizabeth Meyendorff*, Crestwood, NY, 1978.

¹⁰ *Theology and the Church*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980, ch. IV.

upon the objective reality of the divine-human reality which the Christian is called to realize in life. Staniloae's comments are thus pertinent to our search for the relationship between ethics and the icon. He first makes an affirmation of the »objective« character of the image presented.

Words must always be rooted in the perfect image of God which is the humanity of Christ, that is, Christ as man. The icons of Christ serve this same purpose . . . It might seem that there is contradiction between the Fathers' statement that the faithful must be careful not to force the formation of an image of Christ in their imagination, and the assertion of the value of icons. In fact, the Christian is liable to introduce subjective elements taken from his own interior imagination into the image of Christ, and these may well represent a decline from the true image of Christ. It is for this reason that icons are always painted according to fixed canons which make no allowance for the addition of even the least subjective element.¹¹

This presentation in acts, words, and images, and in particular, in the icon, of an »objective« Christ, however raises a question: to what purpose is this presentation made?

4. Ethics and Icons: The Question

This is precisely the nexus where ethics as we have understood it above and the icon occurs. The question is, put differently, »Is there a normative purpose to the icon?« Does the icon not only present a truth, but also present to the believer who stands before it an »ought« which addresses his or her freedom and does it seek a response? Do we speak only of aesthetic appreciation, or even only of the communication of information, or does the icon make a demand upon the believer who witnesses it for what it is, an icon and not a mere picture?

Staniloae sees the image as making such a demand, which seems to create a substantive connection between icon and ethics on the level of human telos, the goal toward which we ought to be moving as human beings. He continues,

This fidelity to Christ whose humanity is the real and definitive image of God, and the formation of the faithful according to this image, are both maintained and achieved through the imitation of his acts in the sacraments, and in the entire effort at imitation of him, and it achieves to a certain extent what was intended by his own acts, the more so as the effort is aided by energy (i.e. divine grace) radiating from him whom the faithful desire to imitate, and who already exists in that risen state which the faithful yearn to share by patterning their own acts on his.¹²

In short, the image of Christ in the icon is a provocation which calls for a response on the part of the beholder to make real in him or her self what the icon presents for contemplation and veneration. From this comes the educative dimension of the icon.

¹¹ Theology and the Church, p. 138.

¹² Ibid.

5. Icons as Didactic

In speaking of the »word« (not the icon), Staniloae specifically sees a normative relationship between the giver of the word and the receiver: He says

*The human word corresponds to the divine reality not only as meaning become conscious in man, but in a more complete manner, as discernment of the divine command and response to it. In the encounter with the divine reality the whole man experiences himself as one engaged in a dialogue with God as a partner obedient and responsible to the divine word. The whole man is thus moulded as an obedient and responsive being in the encounter with God, and the experience of these qualities causes the word to spring up in him as a remembrance in human form of the divine word, and as a response to it. This is the experience of man as one who carries the impress of God and yet is at the same time distinct from him.*¹³

Were this same thought pattern carried over to the icon, it would establish the normative character of the icon as well. For »a partner with God« who is »obedient and responsible« implies an exercise of freedom and choice which is nothing other than ethical.

Nevertheless, modern Orthodox writers have not, by and large chosen to develop the theology of the icon as far as that. At most, they have affirmed what must be a preliminary dimension of the discussion regarding icon and ethics, its didactic character. This is important, because it focuses, even if in a small way, on the dimension of the icon which points toward the worshipping viewer rather than toward the divine.

Even abbreviated and popular accounts of the icon, such as that of Bishop Ware in his *The Orthodox Church* make mention of the didactic character of the icons for the people of God.¹⁴ But the major focus of such treatments is nearly always on the doctrine of the distinction between *λατρεία* (worship) and *τιμή* (honor), the »movement of the honor« from the icon to the »prototype,« and the impact of the doctrine of the icon on the potential sanctity of matter, its transfiguration, the redemption of creation, and the icon as a foretaste of the transfigured cosmos.¹⁵

So also Sahas eloquently points to the didactic nature of the icon in his book *Icon and Logos*. Thus, Icons »serve to ›articulate‹; and accentuate the word of the Scriptures and the theology of the Church. They serve as a means of spiritual elevation and an instrument of instruction, not only for the illiterate, but even for the literate ones who want, however, to penetrate beyond the realm of the word and reason . . . as the word became a means of instruction through hearing, so did the icon through vision.«¹⁶ As such, in Sahas' apt phrase, the icon was »an act of the Church for the Church.«¹⁷ He quotes Fotis Kontoglou, the premier modern Orthodox iconographer, who says that the icons »do not aim only at decorating a church with paintings in order for it to be aesthetically attractive

¹³ Theology and the Church, p. 150.

¹⁴ Theology and the Church, pp. 40–41.

¹⁵ Theology and the Church, p. 42.

¹⁶ Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, pp. 12–13.

¹⁷ Sahas, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

and pleasant to the worshippers, ... but rather in order to elevate them to the mystical world of faith ... »¹⁸

Sahas does, however indicate something of a normative tone to the icon, if only indirectly. In comparing the icon with Renaissance religious painting, he describes it in these »almost ethical« terms: »The Byzantine icon is lean and fasting; it is a statement of faith and of a certain ethos that expresses what is rich in poverty, humility, contrition, with a disposition to the quest for sanctity.¹⁹ However, here the »quest for sanctity« is in the icon, not a provocation for response in the observing worshipper.

George Mantzarides, Professor of Orthodox Ethics at the University of Thessalonike, also skirts the normative dimension of the icon. While affirming that the human being »is a living icon of God,«²⁰ so that he stands in an affinity of relationships with the only true icon of God, the Son, and the saints and, therefore, also with the icon, it is the saints which interest him most, even as he speaks of icons in his Ethics text.

Mantzarides draws an analogy between the Synaxaria (i. e. the lives) of the saints and the icons, both of which call for a »mimesis« or imitation by the Christians. »In the lives of the saints,« he says, »we have something analogous to byzantine iconography. And this is natural, since the saints as ›living icons‹ of the life according to God, present before us the imitation of good works,«²¹ The main purpose of both, according to Mantzarides, is »to give us an idea of the new creation.«²² This is not to be denied, but his treatment does not move beyond the informational. It does not carry with it a normative ring.

Vladimir Lossky, in his chapter on the »Theology of the Image«²³ makes a case for the centrality of the theology of the image in theology. »There is no branch of theological teaching which can be entirely isolated from the problem of the image without danger of severing it from the living stock of Christianity.«²⁴

He clearly meant this in the broadest of understandings, but it holds true as well for our question. The concept of the image certainly is central to Orthodox Christian ethics. As he himself said, »Man created ›in the image‹; is the person capable of manifesting God in the extent to which his nature allows itself to be penetrated by deifying grace. Thus the image — which is inalienable — can become similar or dissimilar, to the extreme limits; that of union with God... or indeed, that of the extremity of falling away.« If the icon is by definition »penetrated by divine grace« the ethical impact of it upon the other »icon of God,« the free image of God who can choose to respond or reject its message, might have been drawn in this passage by Lossky, but it wasn't.

These examples in contemporary Orthodox theology could be multiplied many times over. What we see in much of current theological approaches in the Orthodox Church

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Sahas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 15–16.

²⁰ *Ὁρθόδοξη πνευματικὴ ζωή*, Thessalonike: Pournaras, 1986, p. 30.

²¹ George Mantzarides, *Χριστιανικὴ Ἠθικὴ*, 2nd edition, Thessalonike: Pournaras, 1983, p. 170. Quoting *St. Basil*, Epistle 1, 3, Ed. Y. Courtonne, vol. 1, Paris, 1987, p. 8.

²² Mantzarides, *Ibid.*

²³ *In the Image and Likeness of God*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974, ch. 7.

²⁴ Lossky, *Op. cit.*, p. 126.

from these examples is that the ethical connection with the icon is incipiently present, but is hardly ever articulated by modern Orthodox theology.

Where is it possible to find an expression of such a connection? I believe that it is to be found in the patristic tradition which awaits our re-discovery of it.

6. Icons as Normative

In this paper, the word »normative« designates not a legal, essentially heteronomous demand arising from a moral order extraneous to the ethical subject, as it often does in classical western Christian traditions. Rather, »normative« points to the »telos« and goal of human life, divine-likeness, or »theosis.« This Eastern Christian perspective sees the »norm« of human behavior in the »being of human behavior, i. e., the image of God which is the true and full meaning of our humanity. From this perspective, the issue for us in this paper is whether the icon presents not only an image of God-likeness to the observer, but whether in that presentation, it concurrently conveys a message that the human observer is called to respond to the iconic message by way of response and conformity to its central message. There is, consequently, no heteronomous legalistic character to the use of the term »normative« in this sense. »Normative« in this sense is *endeictic* and evocative of our true goal and purpose as human beings. Stating, the goal of God-likeness thus bears with it an expectation of its fulfillment. It is in this sense that the normative character of icons is addressed in this paper.

The affirmation that the icon is the »book of the illiterate,«²⁵ in the words of St. John of Damascus is but an aspect of the patristic affirmation of the icon as having didactic purpose. As a first step to showing the normative character of the icon it is important to emphasize the »humanward« movement of the icon. Much of the struggle against the iconoclastic movement was on the opposite side of the coin, that is, to show the icon's legitimate relationship to the divine. Just as the words of the Gospel instruct, so it is that for the sake of those who could not read, John of Damascus says in his »Exposition of the Orthodox Faith«, »the Fathers gave their sanction to depicting these events on images as befit acts of great heroism, in order that they should form a concise memorial of them.«²⁶ Thus, the 82nd canon of the 6th Ecumenical Council authorized the full human icon (and not symbolic representation of Christ as a lamb) »in order to expose to the sight of all, at least with the help of painting, that which is perfect ...«²⁷

Beyond this, however, there is a patristic teaching which points to the normative purpose and character of the icon. That is, its purpose is not only to provide knowledge, nor only to point to higher realms, but to provoke a response to that reality, a response of imitation, so to speak, that the painted icon causes the living icon of God to respond in life and behavior in imitation of Christ and the Saints whom the painted icon presents. Implicit is the living icon's essential human freedom to respond affirmatively or negatively to the ethical imperative of the icon.

²⁵ *St. John of Damascus, On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those who Attack the Divine Images*. Trans. David Anderson. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980, p. 28.

²⁶ Chapter XVI, *The Nicene and Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series. Vol. IX.

²⁷ Quoted in *John Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1974, p. 45.

Thus, Saint Basil, in his homily »On the Forty Holy Martyrs« makes the parallel between the persuasive function of rhetoric and the persuasive function of the painting: »The brave deeds accomplished in time of war are celebrated by both orators and artists. Orators remember them with decorous words; artists with paintbrush and canvas, and both inspire everyone with valor. That which words are to the ear, silent pictures reveal for imitation.«²⁸ In his sermon on the martyr Barlaam, St. Basil gives us a personal experience of this impact of the icon. After comparing the feebleness of his own writing with the power of the icon in depicting the courage of the saint, he exclaims »Would that I may be included in this image, and be united with Christ, the Judge of the contest. To Him be glory unto ages of ages.«²⁹

Another defender of Icons during the iconoclastic period, Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople also serves to point to the normative character of the icon. In his book, *In Defense of the Faith*, Fr. John Travis describes the theology of Nikephoros in reference to the iconographer's craft. Several reasons justifying its place in the worship of the Church are delineated. One is that »iconography as a craft has a divine purpose, our salvation and future blessedness.« This is a concern with the human side of the theology of the icon, in that »it leads us to the evangelical vision and memory of those things characterized as honorable and venerable.« Further, »iconography is functionally instructive,« it is an »educational visual aid.«³⁰ This is familiar territory.

But, Nikephoros also moves on toward the normative dimension. For, Nikephoros writes, people, »by looking at the painted images, bring to mind the valiant deeds of those who served God with all sincerity and (are thus) incited to rival the glorious and ever-memorable exploits, through which they exchanged earth for heaven ...«³¹ This still speaks of the icon, but sees it as a provocation for response by the faithful. While it exclusively describes those who favorably respond, not taking into account those who do not, it nevertheless presents the icon as bearing a message whose purpose it is to elicit a response.

It is St. John the Damascene who most clearly presents the normative dimension of the icon, by articulating that one of its purposes is to elicit imitation of the one pictured in the icon by the one viewing it. He does this in several places. Regarding the saints, in his »Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,« he writes, »Let us raise monuments to them and visible images, and let us ourselves become, through imitation of their virtues, living monuments and images of them.«³² Elsewhere in the same work in his chapter »Concerning Images« he again refers to the emulation and imitation of the saints.³³

However, the function of the icon to provoke imitation toward virtue is most clearly seen in St. John of Damascus' three homilies on the Divine Images. I would like to present

²⁸ Quoted by *John of Damascus*, *On the Divine Images*, p. 91.

²⁹ *John of Damascus*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 35–36.

³⁰ *John Travis*, *In Defense of the Faith: The Theology of Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1984, p. 48.

³¹ *Travis*, *Op. cit.*, p. 58, note 25.

³² Chapter XV, *The Nicene and Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, Vol. IX, p. 87.

³³ Chapter XVI, *The Nicene and Ante-Nicene Fathers*, p. 38.

this evidence in the form of an uncommented upon *catenae* of excerpts from these writings so that they may make their own impact, reserving my comment for the conclusion of this section.

»(T)hings which have already taken place are remembered by means of images, whether for the purpose of inspiring wonder, or honor, or shame, or to encourage those who look upon them to practice good and avoid evil.«³⁴

»I bow down before the images of Christ, the incarnate God; of our Lady, the Theotokos and Mother of the Son of God; and of the saints, who are God's friends. In struggling against evil they have shed their blood; they have imitated Christ who shed His Blood for them by shedding their blood for Him. I make a record of the prowess and sufferings of those who have walked in His footsteps, that I may be sanctified, and be set on fire to imitate them zealously.«³⁵

»Shame on you wicked devil, for grudging us the sight of our Master's likeness, and the holiness which proceeds from it . . . You are jealous of the honor which God has given to the saints. You wish us neither to see their glory portrayed nor zealously to imitate their courage and faith.«³⁶

»But concerning this business of images, we must search for the truth, and the intention of those who make them. If it is really and truly for the glory of God and of His saints, to promote virtue, the avoidance of evil and the salvation of souls, then accept them with due honor . . .«³⁷

»Images are a source of profit, help, and salvation for all, since they make things so obviously manifest, enabling us to perceive hidden things. Thus, we are encouraged to desire and imitate what is good and to shun and hate what is evil.«³⁸

»The sixth kind of image is made for the remembrance of past events . . . They assist the increase of virtue that evil men might be put to shame and overthrown, and they benefit generations to come, that by gazing on such images we may be encouraged to flee evil and desire good.«³⁹

»Therefore, we now set up images in remembrance of valiant men, that we may zealously desire to follow their example.«⁴⁰

Finally, let me note that John of Damascus, in the second of these homilies, instructs his readers that »the truth must be distinguished from falsehood in everything, and it is necessary to investigate whether the motive of each deed is good or bad.«⁴¹

³⁴ John of Damascus, On the Divine Images, p. 21.

³⁵ John of Damascus, Op. cit., p. 29. Translation slightly modified.

³⁶ John of Damascus, Op. cit., p. 53. Translation slightly modified.

³⁷ John of Damascus, Op. cit., p. 58.

³⁸ John of Damascus, On the Divine Images., p. 74.

³⁹ John of Damascus, Op. cit., p. 77.

⁴⁰ John of Damascus, Op. cit., p. 78.

⁴¹ John of Damascus, Op. cit., p. 57.

That quite ethical injunction is applicable as well to the concerns of this paper on the relationship of ethics to icons. The Damascene has clearly indicated to us through the passages just quoted that one of the purposes of a genuine icon is that it provoke choices for good and the avoidance of evil. One of the reasons icons are presented in worship is to impress their virtue upon us, to incite us to respond positively to it, and to incorporate it into our lives. It is this sense of one of the purposes of the icon is to produce a hunger for righteousness in us which may have caused the 7th Ecumenical Council to include in its decree on the icons the teaching that frequent contemplation of icons lifts men up »to the memory of their prototypes, and to a longing after them.«⁴²

II. Forgetfulness and Renewal of the Tradition

If it be true then, that there is a normative dimension to the icon, thus creating a connection between the icon and ethics in the Eastern Christian tradition, why has this tradition, by and large been forgotten in most of the theological writing about icons in the contemporary Orthodox Church? I believe that this might be explained by two major historical factors, the course of the iconoclastic polemic and the distinction between Eastern Christian approaches to the icon and western approaches to it.

1. The Iconoclastic Polemic

Jaroslav Pelikan, in his *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*,⁴³ points to differing approaches to the theology of the icon from the perspective of the Orthodox iconophile tradition: the »traditional,« the »christological,« and the »scholastic.« The major figures in the development of these approaches were John of Damascus, Theodore the Studite and Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople, all of whom were directly involved in the iconoclastic controversy. Each responded in their defense to different kinds of challenges. For example one can see that difference clearly in the quite pastoral tenor of the Damascene and the »philosophical/scholastic« tone of Theodore the Studite.

A careful reading of Theodore the Studite's three »Refutations of the Iconoclasts«⁴⁴ provides not one shred of evidence for concern from his perspective on what we have called here »the human side« of the icon. Rather, his concern is to deal with the philosophico-theological issues related to the theological legitimacy of the icon. In part, the placing of the issue exclusively on the »divine side« of the icon effectively robbed it of its normative emphasis. Much of the subsequent treatment of icons in Orthodox history tended to do the same thing. This was in concert with other factors as well. The conservative ethos forced on the Church by the Ottoman domination and policies of Peter the Great tended to turn the whole of worship and liturgy into a grand, yet secret mystery play, which was

⁴² Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Series, vol. XIV, p. 550.

⁴³ Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp. 119.

⁴⁴ *St. Theodore The Studite, On the Holy Icons*. Trans. Catharine P. Roth. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981.

focused more upon itself than upon the worshipper. The theological emphasis on the »icon in itself« was then the motif for subsequent response to Protestant iconoclastic charges. In it all, the aspect of the purpose of the icon designed to challenge response from the worshipper was lost.

Further, in as much as the Orthodox theology of the icon developed in the first instance as an apologetic and a defense against the attacks of the iconoclasts, it formulated its positions and arguments in opposition to theirs. It is oftentimes noted that the iconoclasts were not all of the same mind. While many sought the total destruction of the icons, others were willing to keep them, *provided they were placed high enough so that they could be seen, but not venerated*.⁴⁵ Part of the Studite's argument against the iconoclasts precisely consisted in opposing this view.⁴⁶ The Studite thus reports the position of some of the iconoclasts: »... at another time they ... say instead, the depiction is good, because it is useful for education and memory, but is not for veneration. For this reason they assign the icon a place high up in the church ... «⁴⁷ Could it be that precisely because this seemed to be an aspect of an iconoclast argument, that Theodore never wanted to assert it or appear to adopt it? Did this help create an environment which did not want to encourage an approach to the icon which focused on its human side, its normative aspect?

It would seem to be the case, since there was a long-standing positive iconoclastic argument regarding the ethical aspect of icons. Milton V. Anastos, in his article »The Ethical Theory of Images Formulated by the Iconoclasts in 754 and 815«⁴⁸ documents this iconoclastic approach. This view argued against the icons as inadequate for ethical assistance, since it was the prototypes, i. e. Christ and the saints, who served this purpose through their lives, and not the »soul-less« (*ἄψυχα*) icons. In order to combat such a view, it was precisely the »Godward« dimension of the icon which had to be affirmed and defended, that is, to show how the icon was precisely a »window on heaven« and a vehicle of communion with the divine. Focus on this aspect of the icon was necessary to combat not only the charge of idolatry, but also to provide the grounding for a defense of the »humanward« side of the icon. In the process it is easy to understand how it may have been the required theological tactic not to speak of the »humanward« side of the icon, so long as the »Godward« side had not been accepted by the opponents. In the further treatment, the historically conditioned »other-worldly dimensions« the Orthodox experience in the Turkish Ottoman Empire and in the Russia of Peter the Great may have served to blunt and almost eliminate the memory of the »humanward« and ethical dimensions of the icon.

2. The Western Approach

This argument might appear stronger for us if we observe another dynamic which characterized the Latin or Western part of the Church. Here, historical forces can be seen

⁴⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Ibid.*, pp. 130–133.

⁴⁶ *St. Theodore The Studite*, »1st Refutation«, 13. On the Holy Icons, p. 34.

⁴⁷ *St. Theodore The Studite*, »2nd Refutation of the Iconoclasts«, Introduction, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁴⁸ *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*: Number Eight. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954, pp. 152–160.

as reinforcing the Eastern »Godward« approach to the icon, and encouraging an unwillingness to address the »humanward,« ethical aspect of the icon. Fr. Meyendorff points out that it was only the Byzantine Church which fully developed the theology of the icon. He notes: »Of all the cultural families of Christianity — the Latin, the Syrian, the Egyptian, or the Armenian — the Byzantine was the only one in which art became inseparable from theology.«⁴⁹

The West's views of the icon were not anywhere as theologically grounded as were those of the East, nor was iconography as widely developed. The concept of the sanctity of matter, so strongly emphasized in the East had a much less central place in the thought and piety of the West. As J. M. Hussey put it, »This was a conception not unknown in the West (and found in writings ranging from St. Augustine to Teilhard de Chardin), but in general it was not so much emphasized by western modes of thought. This may be one reason why icons never played so powerful a role in Latin worship as in that of the Orthodox Churches, nor was deification generally so stressed in the West.«⁵⁰

Though the Latins accepted the 7th Ecumenical Council, the Franks and the Carolingians were not enthusiastic about icons. Charlemagne's code of laws, the *Libri Carolini*, emphasized that icons have only a representative character. According to Ernst Benz, this view »led to an essentially instructional and aesthetic concept of images« which focused primarily on them as educational means for the illiterate.⁵¹ In the controversies between East and West following the »Great Schism« (11th century), the West's exclusive »humanward« view may have provoked a greater focus on the theological »divine side,« of the icon, rather than on the »human side,« in the East, as the conflicts between the two caused each side to search for uniqueness and differentiation peculiar to their own positions.

As a result of these historical circumstances, it appears that the East tended more and more to forget the normative character of the icon as the years went by.

3. Reviving the Tradition

There has begun a reclaiming of the tradition of the normative character of the icon, however. The message is still hard to hear among the Orthodox, but credit must be given to Leonid Ouspensky for lifting this dimension up again for us. It seems as if many Eastern Orthodox still want to focus exclusively on the »divine« side of the icon, tending to continue to ignore the evidence for the normative side of the icon. That is why the message must be affirmed once again.

In the first instance, Ouspensky presents us with the icon's connection with the renewal of human nature as the icon of God. Thus, he writes:

Thus, holiness is the achievement of the possibilities given to man by the divine incarnation. It is an example to us. As for the icon, it portrays this achievement, it »explains« it in an image. The icon is intimately connected with the renewal, the deification of the human nature realized by Christ.

⁴⁹ Op. cit., p. 52.

⁵⁰ J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 68.

⁵¹ Ernst W. Benz, »Christian Doctrine«, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 16, pp. 372–373.

Ouspensky takes us back to the »Synodicon« of the 7th Ecumenical Council, whose third paragraph honors those »who believe and who substantiate their words with writings and their deeds with representations, for the propagation and affirmation of the truth by words and images.« He emphasizes the phrase »their deeds with representations,« saying »The presentations imply, therefore, that there are deeds which should be represented.« These representations are of two closely related kinds. »On the one hand man can reestablish through the grace of the Holy Spirit his likeness to God. He can transform himself by an internal effort and make of himself a living icon of God.« On the other, hand, »man can also, for the good of others, translate his inner sanctification into images, either visible or verbal . . . Man can therefore also create an external icon, making use of matter which surrounds him and which has been sanctified by the coming of God on earth.«⁵² Thus, the central ethical act for the Orthodox faith, the active effort for the achievement of divinization, and the creation of the icon, »for the benefit of others,« are presented by Ouspensky as having a common core whose essential purposes are identical. Ethics has become iconic; iconography has become normative.

As a result, the icon in Ouspensky's term becomes »a correct guide for our senses.« The icon, »as an important educational source. Herein,« he says, »lies the essential goal of sacred art. Its constructive role does not lie only in the teaching of the truths of the Christian faith, but in the education of the entire man . . . The content of the icon is, therefore a true spiritual guide for Christian life and, in particular, for prayer.«⁵³

This normative dimension of the icon is thus, in Ouspensky's phrase »a path to follow« along with every other aspect of its rich reality. The goal, thus of the icon, »is to orient all of our feelings, as well as our intellect and all the other aspects of our nature, towards the transfiguration. . . It works like the Gospel, to which it corresponds. Like the deification which it depicts, it suppresses nothing that is human, neither the psychological element, nor the diverse characteristics of man in the world.«⁵⁴ The goal of the icon, its normative goal, is to speak to humanity so as to lead it to orient and direct human life God-ward, toward divinization. The »humanward« and the »Godward« dimensions of the icon are intimately and essentially related.

III. Icon and Ethics

1. The Normative Message of the Icon:

To this point in this paper we have sought to reclaim an earlier patristic tradition which perceived a »human side« to the icon. This aspect, which focused on the beholder of the icon, not only had the evocative power of art, but, we have contended, also presented to the beholder a normative challenge. In part, this occurred because of a natural confluence of the spirit of Orthodox ethics and Orthodox iconography. In so far as he goes, Bulgakov

⁵² Leonid Ouspensky, *The Theology of the Icon*, p. 192.

⁵³ Ouspensky, *Op. cit.*, p. 210.

⁵⁴ Ouspensky, *Op. cit.*, p. 211.

is right when he characterizes Orthodox ethics as imbued with an aesthetic quality. He wrote that »the ideal foundation of Orthodoxy is not ethic, but religious, aesthetic; it is the vision of ›spiritual beauty‹; to gain it one must have a ›spiritual art‹, a creative inspiration.«⁵⁵

In this sense, both the icon and the Orthodox ethic share in the same aim, to present to the Christian the goal and telos of the life of all humanity and all creation, which is the transfiguration of all life and the cosmos toward the divine image. Both icon and ethics present before the observer, and in particular, the believing Christians, what the ultimate norm of human existence is: the deified humanity of Christ and the saints. Christians realize that norm as sanctified creatures.

Thus, Ouspensky clearly states, »... the icon represents the human person, the bearer of a nature which has been deified and restored in its primitive purity. In other words, art, by its appropriate means, portrays the communion of this person with the divinity, his deification.«⁵⁶ From the perspective of Orthodox ethics, »... the goal which embodies our proper humanity is directly commensurate with our beginning in God ... We are to become as much as is humanly possible like God ... we become like God when our ways of thinking, feeling, acting and doing are united with God's way of doing things. We fulfill our purpose as human beings when we are thus united with God.«⁵⁷

But the icon has other normative characteristics as well. We can state some of them on what has been called by ethicists, the »middle axiom« level, that is, not the ultimate norm which Orthodox ethics finds in God-likeness, nor on the level of the direct and immediate prescription or prohibition of concrete acts. The »middle axiom« level of ethical discourse provides general guidelines and principles for moral motives, intents, dispositions and actions.

Among several writers, Daniel J. Sahas has pointed to the fact that the icon by its very nature is contextualized in worship, an ecclesial and corporate phenomenon. »The icon cannot be understood apart from the wider cultural and theological context to which it belongs.« he says.

*This context includes the character of the early Christian community, the essential distinctiveness of Christian theology from other perceptions of God ..., the value that Christianity bestows on man and on the material creation, the distinct faith in the incarnation of God and man's redemption and participation in the divine life, the theology of the Church in terms of her soteriological nature and liturgical character — to mention only a few aspects of this context. Apart from this theological context, or independent of any aspect of it, the icon becomes another painting, and obscure, unintelligible, or naive, for that matter.*⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Sergius Bulgakov*, *The Orthodox Church*. Hialeah, FL: Orthodox Book Center, 1935, p. 179.

⁵⁶ *Sergius Bulgakov*, *Op. cit.*, p. 214.

⁵⁷ *Stanley S. Harakas*, *Toward Transfigured Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing Co., 1983, p. 28.

⁵⁸ *Daniel J. Sahas*, *Icon and Logos*, p. 5. My emphasis.

The icon, then is an ecclesial, corporate phenomenon, just as ethics is ecclesial and corporate, from the Orthodox Christian perspective. By its very nature the icon is communion uniting not only God and the believer who contemplates and reverences it, but also, its formal style and locus in the Church avoids any individualistic privatization of the icon. To reverence an icon is to affirm the commonly experienced truth and faith of the Church, it is an affirmation of our corporate reality as the body of Christ. Whatever else that means for Orthodox Christianity, it is also a normative standard by which selfishness, egotism and atomism are condemned as unfitting and inappropriate to Christian life; and by which community, mutual responsibility and love are affirmed.⁵⁹

The very act of reverencing the icon (*προσκύνησις*) also has ethical import. The history of the Greek term is interesting because it is closely related to the relationship of subject and king. When the subject of the king offered *προσκύνησις* to him, it was an act of submissiveness, obedience and an expression of personal commitment and loyalty, that is, a sign of an act of the will and an expression of an inner disposition.⁶⁰ Further, it was Byzantine practice to have this loyalty expressed by the subjects of the Emperor, whether he was present or not, through the reverencing of his representation. It is not necessary to document how the defenders of the icon, used this royal practice to explain how the honor given to the icon is meaningful only in so much as it is understood as being conveyed to the prototype. It is reminiscent of the liturgical »ought« repeated so frequently in the litanies of Orthodox worship, »let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.«

This last observation leads a further elaboration of the corporate character of both the icon and ethics. We have noted a convergence of the range of »images of God« in the icon, including the human being as the »image of God.« John of Damascus, together with other Fathers of the Church, holds to the opinion that humanity as a whole is the image of God. Honoring the icon of God, that is, respecting the inherent dignity of every human being, is thus a moral requirement. In fact, John of Damascus sees this respect for the dignity of every human being precisely placed in our commonly shared image of God. He calls this respect for the dignity of each human being, »a relative worship« which is »our veneration of each other, since we are God's inheritance, and were made according to His image, and so we are subject to each other, thus fulfilling the law of love.«⁶¹ All Orthodox ethical discussion on human rights, and on justice issues will eventually come back to this foundation. To reverence an icon is to affirm this commonly shared divine reality in every human being.

All of the theology of the icon regarding the acceptability of matter, and its sanctification, so frequently presented in the literature regarding the icon, also clearly provides »middle axiom« grounding for Orthodox ethical reflection on issues such as marriage, sex, economic justice and ecology, to name only a few areas of contemporary concern. An

⁵⁹ See also George Mantzarides, *Χριστιανική Ἠθική*, p.34ff., for a fuller development of this ethical perspective.

⁶⁰ Demetrios Constantinides, *Προσκύνησις* (in Greek), in: *Thee*, Athens 1976, Vol.10, pp.656–657.

⁶¹ John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 3, 37 op.cit., p.87. For a similar statement by Cyril of Jerusalem, see p.102.

example of this approach is to be found in my article »The Integrity of Creation and Ethics« published in 1988.⁶²

All of these finally, coalesce in the understanding of the icon as an act of agapaic unity. It exists to unite the creature with the Creator; to relate the Savior with the redeemed; to elevate the believer into communion with God; to guide the community of the faithful to their ultimate goal; to reveal the beauty and majesty of the Church Triumphant to the Church Militant; to elicit commitment and reverence for God; to attract the believer into a communion with God as »theios eros;« to affirm the corporateness of the body of Christ; in short, (to slightly modify Sahas' phrase which was quoted earlier), the icon is an act of love *by* the Church, *for* the Church. It stands as an attractive, silent witness of God's love for humanity, pointing not to itself, but in both directions, heavenward and toward humanity. It is in this service that it offers itself. In itself, an icon is a response to the divine command that human beings »love God« with a full heart, mind, soul and spirit, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. The icon as a gift to both God and man is an act of love; and love is the supreme virtue in the ethical teaching of Christianity.

2. Icons as Concrete Means of Normative Instruction

This final section will be brief. I wish to show in as concrete a way as possible the functioning of the icon in a normative mode. I wish to go beyond the patristic statements regarding the icon as encouraging Christians in their spiritual lives by providing heroic examples of saints and martyrs. Two examples of the more concrete connection of the icon with moral teaching follow here.

The first has to do with the theology of marriage. Throughout the history of Eastern Christianity, there has been an ongoing tension, in which the monastic life has often been portrayed as »true«, »full«, »perfect«, and »angelic« Christianity. Often the result of this approach has been to weaken the place of marriage in the Christian way of life, considering it as merely a conventional institution designed to facilitate the need of the human race to propagate the species. Some of these views have strong dualistic implications to them, a perspective repeatedly condemned in the canon law and anti-heretical literature of the Church.

In contrast to such a low estimate of Christian marriage, is the tradition which sees Christian marriage as something much more than simply an ecclesial approval or blessing on this otherwise natural social institution. In the tradition of St. John Chrysostom, Christian marriage is approached as the means for the transfiguration of sexuality into an image of the Kingdom of God.⁶³ The virtues of monasticism (purity, poverty and obedience) can be realized in ways appropriate to the unique and special calling of marriage, in what Paul Evdokimov called »Interiorized Monasticism«⁶⁴.

⁶² *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 32 (1988) 37–42.

⁶³ *St. John Chrysostom, On Marriage*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986.

⁶⁴ *The Struggle With God. Tr. Sister Gertrude*. New York: Paulist Press, 1966, Ch. 7, pp. 111–130. See also Vincent Rossi, *Sanctity, Sexuality and Sacrifice*, Epiphany, Winter, 1987, pp. 30–34.

Such a view of marriage means that while some are called to the monastic or celibate life, the vast majority of Christians are called to the married life, there to live to the fullest the Christian goal of God-likeness, or *theosis*. In this sense, the sacramental nature of Christian marriage is a path toward the transfiguration of life. While the celibate or monastic path does have a practical superiority, in that it is simpler, less encumbered, and less fraught with complications, both the monastic and the married callings are equal as to their goal, which is divinization, i. e. conformity to the divine image.⁶⁵

All this is presented in the traditional icon of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. In this icon (plate 1.), the Christ figure is radiant in white robes as He stands on the craggy promontory of Tabor. On either side of Christ, are two figures from the Old Testament who behold the event, as described in the Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration.⁶⁶ They both stand within the aura of the light of the Transfiguration. They both are bowed toward Christ in reverence. They both extend their hands in prayerful adoration. Elijah (Elias) the prophet is celibate. Moses is married. It does not make any difference. They both share in the transfigured life.

The second icon I wish to share with you as an example of the connection of iconography and ethics is a quite unusual work of the contemporary iconographer George Fillipakis, of Woodbury, NY. Mr. Fillipakis earns his living as an iconographer. His work is well known in the United States for the iconography of church interiors as well as the production of panel icons. He is one of dozens of active iconographers at work in this country today.

Fillipakis' work is very traditional. In the spirit of Orthodox iconography, he does not seek to »express himself« in his work, but he seeks to reveal the truth of Faith. His work, like that of all iconographers, seeks to be a window on heaven, to translate into the forms of ecclesial art visions of Kingdom life. Nevertheless, Fillipakis has sought to present a »Kingdom message« of a distinctively ethical character in a work displayed publicly for the first time at the Clergy-Laity Congress of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese held in Boston, MA in July of 1988. Inspired on the one hand by the traditional icon of the »Slaughter of the Innocents« and by an obviously ethical concern in regard to the increased visibility of the abuse of children in our age, he created an icon with the scriptural passage, »as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did not to me« (Matthew 25: 45) as its theme (plate 2). The central figure is Christ, kneeling with his hands outstretched in a protecting stance. Gathered within his sphere of protection are seven children. But beyond the limits of his hands are a series of five figures. On the left bottom, a woman in red hold out the arm of a child on her lap, while next to her a man directs a syringe toward the arm with one hand, while he pulls at the hair of another child. Clockwise, another man holds a child in his one arm while pointing a flagon of alcohol toward the child's mouth. The fourth figure, a man, stands to the right of Christ and holds a child hanging by its feet in one hand, while brandishing a long knife in its direction. The fifth figure, is a woman with a child turned over on her knee as she raises above the child in

⁶⁵ Stephen Muratore, *The Nobler Calling: Marriage or Monasticism?* Epiphany, Winter, 1987, pp. 53–55.

⁶⁶ Mt 17 and Mk 9.

her outstretched hand a multi-stringed whip. Three children lay dead at her feet. In the background is a crucified figure, not Christ, but a child. on the ground at the right knee of Jesus is a scroll indicating that the icon was painted in conjunction with the Archdiocesan emphasis on »The Year of the Homeless and Abused Children.«

The icon is not just a picture. It is an icon. It reveals the divine condemnation of those who abuse children, whether through drugs or alcohol or killing or other violence. It also expresses the divine compassion for the suffering of these innocents. In all, however, it also clearly bears a normative message in regard to a scourge of our time, child abuse. As such it also has a »humanward« message, a clear command regarding the behavior of Christians in regard to children who are threatened or are suffering abuse.

This icon, while far from typical, serves to highlight the ethical dimension of the icon.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to present a little developed aspect of Eastern Christian iconography, its ethical dimension. The claim is that it has shown that *one aspect* of Orthodox iconography is normative, in its »humanward« side. Consequently, it is a call for the restoration this dimension of iconography to its teaching mission, but also to an expansion of the perceptivity of observers and communicants of icons to search for and perceive and share in the ethical dimensions of iconography.

Plate 1



Plate 2

