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Eastern Iconography in the contemporary Protestant West

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Iconography is a gift of the Eastern Orthodox churches to the whole church. A question for Protestant Churches is, “Should the gift be accepted?”

Peter Gunn would be appalled. The Rev Peter Gunn was a missionary from Wick in Scotland to the Gaelic speakers of the Heidelberg district of Melbourne. He was the first minister of the Scots Church in Heidelberg, suburb of Melbourne, which is now a congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia. Portrait photos of all the ministers of the congregation are in the narthex, all except Peter Gunn. He came from a generation of Presbyterians who took so seriously the command that there should be no images of the invisible God that this injunction should also include any depiction of humans, for they are created in the image of God.

It is a curious and, in some respects, a scandalous thing that Protestants are starting to like icons of the Eastern Orthodox traditions. They are accepting the gift. Unlike our forebears I think it a good thing that icons are finding their way into our Protestant churches but welcoming this art form into our fold is not straight forward.

There is more to the gift than the images painted in egg tempera on timber panels. These paintings are not just art. They are not even just religious art. They are liturgical art and are therefore bound to the prayer of their parent churches.

There are two main problems to overcome. The first is that the art form looks a bit strange. The second is that icons are said to have mystical, even miraculous powers to Orthodox Christians.

In this paper I will explore some issues of iconography from the point of view of Protestantism, especially that of the Reformed traditions.

Rejecting and affirming icons

A Protestant, Robert Letham has written:

> Eastern Orthodoxy is increasingly popular in the Anglo-Saxon world. It conveys a sense of mystery, of continuity with the past, of dignified worship at a time when evangelical Protestantism is increasingly cheapened and trivialized. (Letham, 2007, p. 13)

An Eastern Orthodox Christian, Andreas Andreopoulos writes:

> Liturgical practices in the Christian East have always been associated with a kind of sensory richness that many Westerners find difficult to understand. Many Western Christians find a plain church environment conducive to prayer and reflection on the biblical message, but when they enter a candle-lit, fragrant Byzantine church, the walls which are completely covered with icons, they often find the sensory over-load distracting from what is more familiar to them, namely a religious environment that is centred essentially on the written and spoken word. (Andreopoulos, 2008, p. 83)

How appropriate is the popularity of icons to Protestants? Thanks to Eastern Orthodoxy there is a template already in place for answering this question regarding icons. The iconoclastic periods in the history of the church teach us that there has been robust debate over the appropriateness of icons. Protestants can resonate with the arguments against icons of the iconoclasts, and they give assent to the reasoning of John of Damascus and the Second Council of Nicaea for reinstating icons and the parameters prescribed for their use in worship.

The debate raged through much of the eighth century. Though John of Damascus argued in favour of icons he used a rhetorical device that has him give a clear case for iconoclasm:

> How can the invisible be depicted? How does one picture the inconceivable? How can one draw what is limitless immeasurable, infinite? How can a form be given to the formless? How does one paint the bodiless? How can you describe what is a mystery?
> (John of Damascus, 1898)

Then John argues that the Word made flesh is the image of the invisible God:

> I have seen God in human form, and my soul was saved... In former times God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with humans, I make an image of the god whom I see. I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take his abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. (John of Damascus, 1898)

Imbedded in his argument lies something of what may have contributed to the rejection of icons, the perception that icons had become objects of worship.

Our Protestant ancestors would agree with the theology of the iconoclasts. *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, 109 refers to:

> The sins forbidden in the second commandment are… any religious worship not instituted by God himself; [including] making any representation of God… (Letham, 2007, p. 157)

Karl Barth would concur. He argued that any attempt to portray Jesus Christ is 'quite intolerable', the result 'a catastrophe'. (K Barth, *CD,* IV/2: 102-3) (Letham, 2007, p. 159)

The Second Council of Nicaea (787 CE) made its ruling on icons in the church and set the parameters:

> … next to the sign of the precious and life-giving cross,… may be icons of Our Lord and God the Saviour Jesus Christ, or of Our pure Lady the holy Theotokos, or of honourable angels, or of any saint. (Letham, 2007, p. 146)

The Council was clear about the status of icons in the life of the church. They were for their veneration and not to be objects of worship in themselves.

> For the more these are kept in view through their iconographic representation, the more those who look at them are lifted up to remember and have an earnest desire for the prototypes[1]. Also we declare that one may render to them the veneration of honour: not the true worship of our faith, which is due only to the divine nature, but the same kind of veneration as is offered to the form of the precious and life-giving cross, to the holy gospels and to the other holy items. Also we declare that one may honour these by bringing to them

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[1] 'Prototype' refers to the person now in heaven who is depicted in an icon.

> incense and light, as was the pious custom of the early Christians: for the honour to the icon, is conveyed to the prototype. (Letham, 2007, p. 146)

The distinction between worship and veneration should be noted. John of Damascus insisted that we bring worship only to God. (Letham, 2007, p. 150)

Letham points out that λατρεία that translates as 'worship' in English was used in LXX exclusively of the worship due to God. (Letham, 2007, p. 151) The term denotes hired service. Here is a sense of worship that flows out of prayer and religious ritual into action offered in the service of God in the world. This meaning is reflected in a dismissal offered by Harold Leatherland that includes the injunction, '…make your life your worship to the praise and glory of God.' (Uniting in Worship: Leader's Book, 1988, p. 668)

Despite the prescriptions of Nicaea II in 787 there were further attacks on iconography, notably instigated by Emperor Leo V the Armenian in 815. Then the place of icons was assured under Empress Theodosia in 843, an event still celebrated as the Triumph of Orthodoxy. (Letham, 2007, p. 72f)

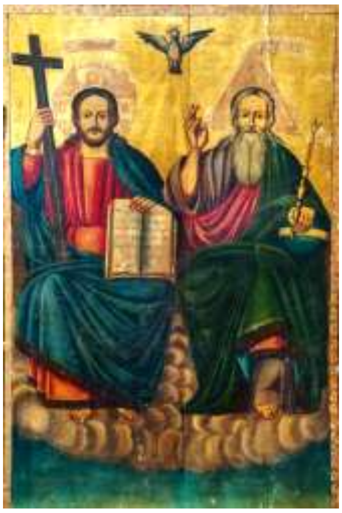
Contemporary Protestants can agree with the arguments in favour of icons given by John of Damascus and Nicaea II. Christ is the image (icon) of the invisible God. God in flesh has appeared to humanity. In representing (re-presenting) his likeness, humanity is helped to pray. In representing those saints and people of faith whose discipleship has become an example of Christian faithfulness those whom the icons represent are brought into our presence and remembering. We look upon icons of Christ, not forgetting that Christ is both human and divine, and remembering that his humanity and divinity are undivided. So, icons since Nicaea II depict Christ in two garments of different colours reminding the church of the two natures of Christ. If we paint an image of Christ, we cannot represent his humanity only and conveniently forget his divine nature.

Painting God

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is critically important to the church, yet depicting this most central of teachings presents particular challenges for iconography. The Holy Spirit is often represented in the image of a dove, sometimes descending more like a peregrine falcon than in the manner accustomed by doves as suggested by the gospels.

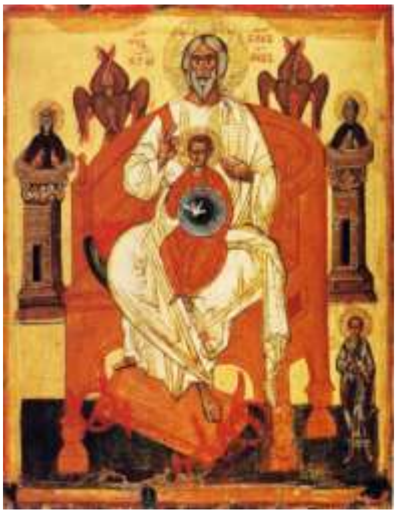
The image of God the Father is never painted, well hardly ever. Sometimes there are hints of the Father's presence and sometimes there is flagrant disregard of this convention. It is not uncommon for a semicircle at the top of an icon or a quarter circle in a top corner with a disembodied hand representing the invisible God giving instruction or authority to a saint.

In regions surrounding Sparta, Greece, there are icons of the Holy Trinity in which a dove hovers between two enthroned figures, one younger with a cruciform halo and the other, older, and bearing an uncomfortable resemblance to Father Christmas, sometimes with a triangular halo.



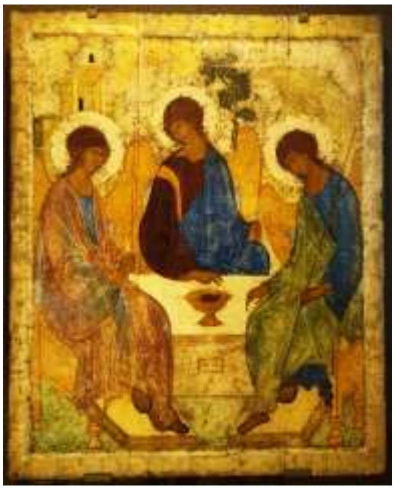
Holy Trinity - Pantanassa, Mystras on Mt Taygetos

In Russia there are still examples from former centuries of God the Father dandling Christ on his knee. Chapter 43 of the 'Acts of the Great Council of Moscow of 1666-1667' states, 'To paint icons of the Lord Sabaoth (that is, the Father) with a white beard, holding the only-begotten Son in his lap with a dove between them is altogether absurd and improper…' (Ouspensky, 1992, p. 371)



Trinity - Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

An icon has developed over many centuries that has been accepted as an appropriate depiction of the Holy Trinity. It remembers the story of the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah to the three messengers at the oaks of Mamre. The progression of successive icons culminates in that painted by Andrea Rublev in Moscow c 1425. The Russian church held this to be the preeminent image for depicting the Trinity. (Bunge, 2007, p. 88) Protestants who embrace iconography revere this icon above all others.



Trinity - Andrea Rublev,Tetryakov Gallery, Moscow

Icons and prayer

Iconography is liturgical art. It is part of the prayer of the church. Orthodox churches are festooned with icons. There are frescos on the walls and ceiling. They are painted on panels mounted onto the screen (*iconostasis*) that separates the nave of the church from the sanctuary. They are set on stands or ambos to enable worshipers to 'visit' them at close quarters, to touch and kiss them. Large panel icons with images painted on both sides accompany church processions.

Orthodox churches are very clear on this point – icons are not objects to be worshiped. They have no mystical powers in themselves. They are created matter that seek to help the worshiper visualise the one who is worthy of worship and ones whose example of Christian living are worthy of remembering and honouring.

A perception of Protestantism is that icons are objects of worship, or at least, veneration. Stories have grown up around particular icons and their mystical and miraculous powers. Irina Gorbunova-Lomax exemplifies this in her book, *Miracle-Working Icons of the Mother of God.* (Lomax, 2016) Ironically, this is written by an iconographer who is outspoken against much of the fables and excessive spirituality that surrounds iconography. (Gorbunova-Lomax, 2018)

Donald Fairbairn notes:

> Once the theological role of icons and relics as emblems of the incarnation and of God's communion with the world has been replaced with the idea that such material objects contain power in themselves, Orthodox people can easily lose sight of the distinction between venerating icons and worshiping God alone. Rather than being a means to union with God, the icons can become the means by which people's attention is distracted from God to the physical objects themselves. These objects then become the focus of people's worship, as they seek the power for their lives that they believe the icons can bring. (Fairbairn, 2002, p. 134)

Maybe so, but is this so different from Western acts of devotion with daily bible reading and prayer. How many of us who keep a daily office may be found to have rushed our devotions as a kind of ritual talisman, a cursory nod to God. It is an irony that any religious observance may become a distraction from God rather than a means of union with God.

I was once on Crete making an early morning visit to the church of St Titus, the first bishop of Crete. People were coming and going, starting the day with their customary devotional observance. I watched a young tradesman dressed in overalls and high viz vest dip his hand in the water of the capacious font in the narthex, then visit an adjoining chapel where he placed his hand on a glass cover atop a gold and jewel encrusted dome under which (so a notice informed me) was the remains of Titus's skull, then he kissed an icon of St Anastasia who is venerated as a healer. Reminded of his baptism and remembering the one who brought the gospel of Christ to his land and offering prayer for healing he rushed off to work. As good an act of acknowledging union with God as many words read or spoken.

The point in these devotional acts of the Orthodox Christians that dismay Protestants is prayer that petitions the saints. Protestants will pray to God through Christ alone. There is no communion between the living and the dead in Protestant understanding.

Robert Gribben has stated:

> [John] Calvin agreed that the saints pray in heaven, but they too pray through Jesus Christ. It is understandable that the emphasis on Christ as Judge meant that the simple faithful sought a more approachable person to put their case, and especially his holy Mother, but Calvin would not have it. (Gribben, 2010, p. ABC Religion and Ethics)

As Protestants embrace iconography, they will need to find their own appropriate means of coming to icons as liturgical art, as a way of prayer.

Protestant encounters with icons

Icons are treasured and venerated objects in the homes of Orthodox Christians. They are smaller, usually less than 50 x 60 cm. These smaller icons are those most familiar to Protestants. Iconographers commonly learn to paint on panels around 21 x 30 cm (A4).

For many, an initial encounter with icons is as a tourist, probably in galleries or souvenir shops in Greece or Russia.

Rob Gallacher taught icon painting over 20 years to church members across every denomination, both West and East. In his classes he gave special time to worship in which an icon took central place. Following explanation of its prevenance and meaning Rob offered a prayer reflection, often in a style familiar across Western churches. This invariably gave thanks to God for the life and Christian examples for which the saint is remembered and a prayer that the same spirit that enlivened the saint's life would give life to us, the worshipers. Each participant was then invited to light a taper from a central candle, venerate the saint by some act of stillness or touch or making the sign of the cross in front of the icon. Rob is relentless in teaching Protestants that icons are all about prayer. The Uniting Church Icon Schools strictly maintain this heritage.

Receiving the gift of icons

Protestants have an increased interest in icons, but there are few instances of finding icons in their churches. Icons of Christ and Mary are more common in churches and cathedrals of episcopal denominations. Over the past forty years there has been changes to what Uniting Church congregations include in their sanctuaries. Candles, liturgical colours, and banners are quite common additions to the one-time minimalist liturgical spaces. Not all the additions have been aesthetically or liturgically appropriate. This raises some concern for the placement of icons in Protestant churches. When a congregation is given an icon or other piece of religious art, there is pastoral pressure to accept the gift and display it. I can think of several instances when congregations did not pay sufficient attention to the placement of art and the effect they have on the integrity of the churches' sanctuaries.

Case Study

St Peter's, Eastern Hill, Melbourne

St Peter's, Eastern Hill in Melbourne has a collection of twelve icons. They belong well in the very traditional Anglican Church because attention was paid to their commissioning and placement. They are uniform in design. Each saint was chosen for a reason. They hang from a screen that is very high and does not disturb the architectural or liturgical integrity of the sanctuary. They do not have the highest order of artistic merit, but they belong where they are because they are painted by the congregation's icon school.

Some considerations for Protestants

If Protestants are to be serious about accepting the Orthodox churches' gift of icons, then attention should be paid to the place of icons in the liturgical life of the churches. This attention must include the integrity of iconography within Orthodoxy guided by foundational statements of Nicaea II and the arguments offered by John of Damascus.

Many Protestants are enjoying painting/writing (same word in Greek) icons. We have not grown up with them, so we need to learn how to read icons and pray with icons.

Many writers on iconography appreciate this need. Some of the most helpful of these have converted to Orthodox churches from the West, examples being Aidan Hart in the UK and Gabriel Bunge a former Benedictine. Much theological literature comes from Russians in exile during the Soviet era, notably Leonid Ouspensky.

Significantly, 21st century commentators are drawing attention away from 20th century theological perspectives to emphasise the directives from the 8th and 9th centuries. Among these Aidan Hart names Evan Freeman, George Kordis, Irina Gorbunova-Lomax, and Julia Bridget-Hayes (Hart A. , 2016) Protestants could welcome this emphasis because there was a growing clutter of mysticised confusion that helps blur the distinction between venerating the one whom the icon represents and attributing miraculous qualities to the icon panel.

A report of the World Council of Churches from 1988 has this helpful comment on the holiness of icons:

> The image is holy because the One who is worshipped through it is holy, and because those who venerate it are called to holiness. (Bria, 1988, p. 4)

Placing icons in a Protestant church

Initial considerations to placing icons in a Protestant church will include whether the congregation will be helped in its worship by including icons, whether the overall décor of the church is compromised by the inclusion of icons, whether a congregation should accept the gift of icons from well-meaning donors, or whether a wise option would be to commission icons rather than accept whatever comes along.

Like stained glass windows, placing icons on side walls of a church is a safe option. Placing icons suitable for the season or the day such as one representing a Scripture text, or the commemoration of a saint or person of faith could face the congregation from the space/s occupied by holy furniture. They should have their own stand or ambo. They may be placed juxtaposed to appropriate furniture. An icon of the Baptism of Jesus might stand beside the font. The holy table is where the Eucharist is celebrated. It is not an icon stand. Alas, this is an easy option and should be avoided.

Learning the language of icons

We can take time to study the traditional messages imbedded in icons, hands held in blessing that speak of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ, three stars noting Mary's purity, and some of the characteristics that typify various saints and archangels. Much is written of a stillness that contemplation of an icon brings to the worshiper.

However, at this point of my journey with icons and their language I am more of a mind to let the icons speak for themselves, let them teach us what they have to say. Don't be so fussed about what commentators tell us to see and feel. A prayerful encounter with an icon could consist of a reflection informed by two questions. First, what can I see in this icon? Then, what might this icon see in me? Lawrence Cross reminds us that we are receiving the gaze of the one who looks back at us "knowing us and loving us to a newfound transformation" (Cross, 2014, p. 59)

Of course, some sign posts would help. A meaningful dialogue with an icon will be assisted by access to a biography or the Scripture text that informed the artist. We need to know an icon's backstory. At this point Western Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy need to meet with integrity. A study of the history and prevenance of an icon's development can enrich our prayer. We need to guard against spurious spiritualised symbolism, but stories of icons may include their history of miraculous attributes that will have shaped the prayer of Orthodox Christians. Protestants are not to scorn these accounts but hear them as an integral part of the story of the life of the church. This is part of the backstory. This is part of the rich heritage that has drawn Protestants to iconography. Remember Robert Letham's words:

> [An icon] conveys a sense of mystery, of continuity with the past, of dignified worship at a time when evangelical Protestantism is increasingly cheapened and trivialized. (Letham, 2007, p. 13)

Let the colours and shapes that depict holy stories infuse our lives with the holiness of those they image for us.

Conclusion

Icons are the gift of Eastern Orthodoxy to the whole church. Protestants emerging from their own long iconoclastic season can learn from the story that led to the Triumph of Orthodoxy (843 CE). The theological justification in favour of icons prescribed by Nicaea II (787 CE) resonates comfortably with contemporary Protestant integrity. John of Damascus reminds us that in Christ we have seen the invisible God become visible and interacted with humankind in human form. Indeed, it is a calling of believers to help others to see the means of human salvation. Icons help do this. But remember also that these images, while being bearers of a holy image, are not, of themselves, worthy of the worship that is due only to God.

Icons are inextricably connected to the prayer of the church. Protestants are well used to words and music to guide their prayers. It behooves those who accept the Orthodox gift of icons to respect Eastern traditions, but it does not necessitate imitating Orthodox prayer practices.

In contemporary society so set on overstimulating our senses, the stillness that contemplation of icons offers is just what is needed in Protestant prayer.

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Response by Robert Gribben to Peter Blackwood, Eastern Iconography in the contemporary Protestant West

This was an intriguing paper, particularly for a fellow-Uniting Church minister to ponder. I had prepared a response before the Fremantle conference, but spoke mostly off the cuff, because I think that Peter had covered the expected difficulties in his paper. What follows is a record of some of my ponderings and a few new thoughts. Peter carefully defined his locus: the 'Protestant West'. He and I come from different traditions, his, Presbyterian, mine Methodist. Calvinism, especially when the Puritans ruled England, did have a strong iconoclastic period; Methodism, also in part a child of Puritanism, arose after the 16th century Reformation, and after the Civil War, and had no architectural relics to plunder - but regarded themselves as 'plain' people, so continued to believe that visual signs would distract from pure worship, and symbol was to be distrusted. Both Protestant traditions looked to what they numbered the Second Commandment, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image; the context of which is idolatry, the images of pagan religion, graven, carved from wood or moulded of metal. It seems to me that the biblical judgement was chiefly one of ridicule: how could such gods have any power? It also included destruction. Peter Blackwood cites examples of modern Reformed thinkers, including Barth, who continue to oppose icons and religious imagery, vehemently

Yet, there is increasing evidence that Judaism (and even Islam) tolerated certain forms of religious art, and I have gazed with astonishment at the plethora of human figures and animals on the walls of the Dura Europa synagogue (165-200 CE), now safe (I hope) in the museum at Damascus. Christians under Muslim rule were also generally allowed to make their icons. The mosaics in Hagia Sophia were whitewashed, not destroyed, and live to tell their tale.

The Uniting Church thus inherited a suspicion of images and art. But it is a strange fact that since 1977, 'plainness' is not a word to describe what has happened in its church buildings or on its liturgical ministers. Perhaps our birth forty years ago means we are not quite 'western Protestants'. But among many older members, there is still a reaction to Anglican pomp and Catholic elaboration. Perhaps the more solemn fact of history is that every conquering army destroys the living signs of the previous culture, religious or other. The troops did it during the English Civil War and the French Revolution. Assad, father and son, did it in Syria; ISIS did it in Mosel and Palmyra and Aleppo. The next generation loses those visible and tangible aides-memoire of deep loyalties to state or faith. Eamon Duffy[2] has brought this out strongly in terms of the spoliation of church treasures under Thomas Cromwell and King Henry VIII, Defender of Catholic Faith - who was also in need of funds to secure his newly independent state. The art, the architecture, sculpture, vestments, the plate of mediaeval England, the manuscripts of music, the literature of Catholic piety, are an irreparable loss to all humankind. We can all recognize that now.

For all of our church traditions carry a culture. It is a common observation by church historians, and acknowledged in some ecumenical dialogues, that when churches divide (often following their nations), thereafter they define themselves over against the other. choosing to lose some things rather than appear to be recidivist. The penalties at the times, of course, were prison, exile or death. So, Peter Blackwood has caused us to ponder the problem of a church tradition - Protestant - which was born out of thorough iconoclasm, justified by a gracious biblical commandment turned into a rule.

Along with hundreds of Protestant churches we once had an iconic picture which appeared in almost every church or Sunday school. It was the painting by Herbert Beecroft (1864-1951) *'And Jesus*

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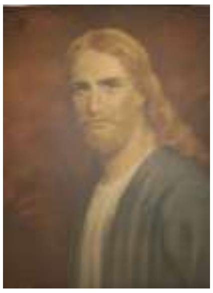
[2] e.g. Eamon Duffy, Saints, Sacrilege, Sedition, Religion and Conflict in the Tudor Reformations, London: Bloomsbury, 2012, and in several of his other books and articles.



turned and looked upon Peter… and Peter remembered' (1927),[3] which has unnerved countless good Protestant worshippers. Did Jesus intend his glance to give rise to *guilt and shame*, I wonder? Hardly He built a church on that rock! The blue eyes and the light brown hair are difficult enough, but it is the *sentiment* that ruins it. That cannot be said of icons.[4] But you might say that this particular painting is 'venerated' among Protestants.

Our Uniting theological college in Melbourne has ample opportunity to 'do something' with icons. You enter its line chapel by walking past several icons, painted by Peter Blackwood. Most worshippers seem to do that without a glance. An icon is sometimes displayed on the ambo, facing the congregation, perhaps the most advantageous location for one. But such congregations as gather there (and more so elsewhere) need lo he taught what they should or could do with such a picture, what an icon is, what lt represents, and why it's not just another 'visual aid' (as we used to call such things). Again, it's not normal practice to go up to something on the wall during worship and examine it closely, let alone, as the babushkas do, teach their Russian grandchildren, to make a deep bow, hand touching the floor, and a sign of the cross (taking it up, as it were). We have no tradition of catechesis for such things. We have almost lost any awe of God. We need to recover a biblical godly fear. I sometimes wonder if an eye for beauty has been bred out of us.

Peter acknowledges these challenges throughout his well-balanced paper. He is perhaps more hopeful than I am. He knows the spirit of icons, from the discipline of writing them. I think he is right that the ecological arguments of John of Damascus, about the incarnation changing the nature of all matter, may be one way in which Protestants might be led into their profound meaning. Our trouble is that we think too much, and have lost the naiveté which allows a simple gut- or heart-response. We are intellectual in a way Orthodoxy has never been?

I do think that this generation is in a better position to discover icons than mine or perhaps any previous one. The Community of Taizé has taught a generation of youth to pray with icons. The ecumenical movement has given permission to admire, criticise, and borrow from other traditions. The liturgical movement has allowed us to open our eyes during prayer! The media have brought unceasing visual stimulation into our lives, accompanied by the endless chatter of the social media - and there lies the new problem - finding time and space without which an icon is merely another competitor for our attention. The terrible temptation, much given into, is to clutter our place of worship.

Or does all this simply mean I have Puritan blood in my veins? I believe not: there is such a thing as simple beauty, 'the beauty of holiness? to quote the text which was the only decoration on the wall of many a Protestant chapel. Even that definitive Puritan, John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrims Progress, pleaded with his people to open their 'eye-gate' as well as their 'ear-gate' to receive the Gospel. And there is now permission for the other senses to be opened up too. But the question remains: what does provoke Western Protestants to worship? A burning bush would be impossible with health and safety regulations, and candles too are risky, not to speak of the noxious fumes of holy smoke! But there is converting power in image and symbol, and with Peter Blackwood, I want them to have a chance to speak.

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[3] See e.g, https://artuk.org/discover/artistgl \eecrolj-herhert-18641951 for an image.

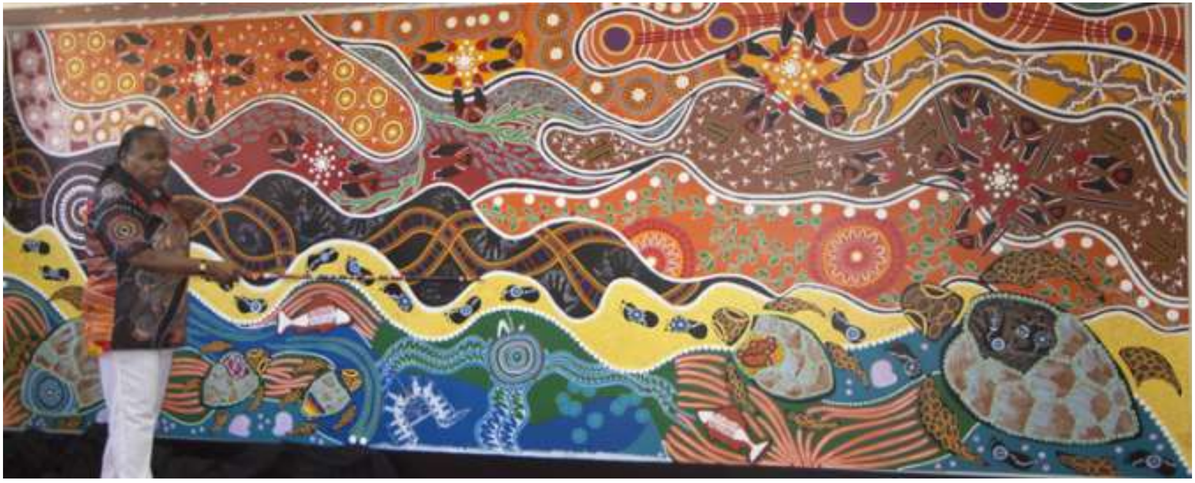
[4] Except (in my view) for some 19th century Russian ones, under western humanist influence.

Response by Aunty Neta Knapp to Peter Blackwood, Eastern iconography in the contemporary Protestant West

Iconography plays an important part in Aboriginal culture. We have lived by our signs, icons and symbols for over 60,000 years. Gur spiritual relationship to land, and how we live our lives in relation to land, is taught through our iconography From Peter, we have learnt Eastern iconography is a gift. For us our iconography too is a gift. Our iconography is a reminder that the sacred world is all around us. In our land (hence Sacred Sites), the trees, and in the waters.

As an artist, the signs and symbols that I paint are part of a much bigger story. All of these iconographies, for example the circle, lines, trees and animal tracks are stories which have meaning and have been passed onto us from our ancestors. Over thousands of years our ancestors have used paintings to teach us about how to care for the land and how to care for each other. Today by painting, I am following in the footsteps of my ancestors. Traditional Aboriginal people painted using Ochres. While some communities still use Ochres, many artists like myself use contemporary materials. For example, instead of painting on bark, or rocks, We paint on canvas. By doing so, this does not make our stories less important. We are still telling the same story, we are just using a different medium.

Peter refers to the dove as representing the ‘Holy Trinity’ For us, one of the important symbols of our Creation period (some people refer to this as Dreaming, or Dreamtime) are dots. Dots represent travel, and in some paintings the dots represent how the Ancestor Beings (from Dreamtime) travelled and made the land. In my case dots represent footprints. In the mural painting in Manjaree the dots represent how our ancestors (from the Central Desert, the Pilbara, the Torres Strait Islanders and Nyoongar country) have travelled all over this land for thousands of years. When I paint the icons of dots, I am working in sacred space. I paint with strength, cultural knowledge and pride. Being strong in culture, represents being strong in Spirit. For those of you who are not familiar with Aboriginal iconography, or those of you who now have a bit more of an understanding, I hope you will have the opportunity to visit the Manjaree Centre and view the beautiful mural I had the pleasure of doing with the Indigenous students of the University of Notre Dame.



Manjaree Mia Kaart Project: Neta Knapp, Nyungar Elder and Artist-in-Residence at the University of

Notre Dame Australia. Acrylic on canvas, approximately 5m x 2.5rn. Student artists: Danielle Thurlow, Dana Anaru, Dejanne Clanton, Corey Dalton, Jade Walley, Kesahane Graham.