

The Question of Images

IN THE FIRST commandment of the Decalogue, which underscores the uniqueness of the God to whom alone adoration is due, we read this admonition: "You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Ex 20:4; cf. Deut 5:8). There is a notable exception to this prohibition of images at the very center of the Old Testament, one that concerns the most sacred of places, the gold covering of the Ark of the Covenant, which was regarded as the place of expiation. "There I will meet with you", says God to Moses, "I will speak with you of all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel" (Ex 25:22). With regard to the fashioning of the covering, Moses receives the following instructions: "And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. . . . The cherubim shall spread out their wings above. . . . [T]heir faces [shall be turned] one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be" (Ex 25:18-20). The mysterious beings that cover and protect the place of divine revelation can be represented, precisely to conceal the mystery of the

presence of God himself. As we have already seen, Saint Paul saw the crucified Christ as the true and living "place of expiation", of whom the "mercy seat", the *kapporeth* lost during the Exile, was but a foreshadowing. In him God has now, so to speak, lifted the veil from his face. The Eastern Church's icon of the Resurrection of Christ takes up this link between the Ark of the Covenant and the Paschal Mystery of Christ when it shows Christ standing on cross-shaped slabs, which symbolize the grave but also suggest a reference to the *kapporeth* of the Old Covenant. Christ is flanked by the cherubim and approached by the women who came to the tomb to anoint him. The fundamental image of the Old Testament is retained, but it is reshaped in the light of the Resurrection and given a new center: the God who no longer completely conceals himself but now shows himself in the form of the Son. This transformation of the narrative of the Ark of the Covenant into an image of the Resurrection reveals the very heart of the development from Old Testament to New. However, if we are to understand it correctly in its totality, we must follow the main lines of the development a little more closely.

The prohibition of images in Islam and in Judaism since about the third or fourth century A.D. has been interpreted in a radical way, so that only non-figurative, geometrical designs are permitted in the ornamentation of the sanctuary. However, in the Judaism at the time of Jesus and well into the third century, a much more generous interpretation of the image-question developed. Paradoxically, in the images of salvation we see exactly the same continuity between synagogue and church that we have already noticed in our discussion of liturgical space. As a result of archaeological discoveries, we now

know that the ancient synagogues were richly decorated with representations of scenes from the Bible. They were by no means regarded as mere images of past events, as a kind of pictorial history lesson, but as a narrative (*haggadah*), which, while calling something to mind, makes it present. On liturgical feasts, the deeds of God in the past are made present. The feasts are a participation in God's action in time, and the images themselves, as remembrance in visible form, are involved in the liturgical re-presentation. The Christian images, as we find them in the catacombs, simply take up and develop the canon of images already established by the synagogue, while giving it a new modality of presence. The individual events are now ordered toward the Christian sacraments and to Christ himself. Noah's ark and the crossing of the Red Sea now point to Baptism. The sacrifice of Isaac and the meal of the three angels with Abraham speak of Christ's Sacrifice and the Eucharist. Shining through the rescue of the three young men from the fiery furnace and of Daniel from the lions' den we see Christ's Resurrection and our own. Still more than in the synagogue, the point of the images is not to tell a story about something in the past, but to incorporate the events of history into the sacrament. In past history, Christ with his sacraments is on his way through the ages. We are taken into the events. The events themselves transcend the passing of time and become present in our midst through the sacramental action of the Church.

The centering of all history in Christ is both the liturgical transmission of that history and the expression of a new experience of time, in which past, present, and future make contact because they have been inserted into the presence of the risen Lord. As we have seen already

and now find confirmed anew, liturgical presence contains eschatological hope within it. All sacred images are, without exception, in a certain sense images of the Resurrection, history read in the light of the Resurrection, and for that very reason they are images of hope, giving us the assurance of the world to come, of the final coming of Christ. However inferior the first images of the Christian tradition may often be in their artistic qualities, an extraordinary spiritual process has taken place in them, though one that is in close and deep unity with the iconography of the synagogue. The Resurrection sheds a new light on history. It is seen as a path of hope, into which the images draw us. Thus the images of the early Church have a thoroughly sacramental significance. They have the character of mysteries, going far beyond the didactic function of telling the stories of the Bible.

None of the early images attempts to give us anything like a portrait of Christ. Instead, Christ is shown in his significance, in "allegorical" images—for example, as the true philosopher instructing us in the art of living and dying. He appears as the great teacher, but above all in the form of the shepherd. The reason why this image, which is derived from Sacred Scripture, became so precious to early Christianity is that the shepherd was regarded as an allegory of the Logos. The Logos, through whom all things were made, who bears within himself, so to speak, the archetypes of all existing things, is the guardian of creation. In the Incarnation, he takes the lost sheep, human nature, humanity as a whole, onto his shoulders and carries it home. The image of the shepherd thus sums up the whole of salvation history: God's entry into history, the Incarnation, the pursuit of the lost sheep, and the

homeward path into the Church of the Jews and Gentiles.

One development of far-reaching importance in the history of the images of faith was the emergence for the first time of a so-called *acheiropoietos*, an image which has not been made by human hands and portrays the very face of Christ. Two of these images appeared in the East at about the same time in the middle of the sixth century. The first of these was the so-called *camulianium*, the imprint of the image of Christ on a woman's gown. The second was the *mandylion*, as it was called later, which was brought from Edessa in Syria to Constantinople and is thought by many scholars today to be identical with the Shroud of Turin. In each case, as with the Turin Shroud, it must have been a question of a truly mysterious image, which no human artistry was capable of producing. In some inexplicable way, it appeared imprinted upon cloth and claimed to show the true face of Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. The first appearance of this image must have provoked immense fascination. Now at last could the true face of the Lord, hitherto hidden, be seen and thus the promise be fulfilled: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). The sight of the God-Man and, through him, of God himself seemed to have been opened up; the Greek longing for the vision of the Eternal seemed to be fulfilled. Thus the icon inevitably assumed in its form the status of a sacrament. It was regarded as bestowing a communion no less than that of the Eucharist. People began to think that there was virtually a kind of real presence of the Person imaged in the image. The image in this case, the image not made by human hands, was an image in the full sense, a

participation in the reality concerned, the refulgence and thus the presence of the One who gives himself in the image. It is not hard to see why the images modeled on the *acheiropoietos* became the center of the whole canon of iconography, which meanwhile had made progress and was understood better in its wider implications.

Clearly, though, there was a danger lurking here: a false sacramentalizing of the image, which seemed to lead beyond the sacraments and their hiddenness into a direct vision of the divine presence. And so it is also clear that this new development was bound to lead to violent counter-movements, to that radical rejection of the image which we call "iconoclasm", the destruction of images. Iconoclasm derived its passion in part from truly religious motives, from the undeniable dangers of a kind of adoration of the image, but also from a cluster of political factors. It was important for the Byzantine emperors not to give any unnecessary provocation to Muslims and Jews. The suppression of images could be beneficial to the unity of the empire and to relations with the empire's Muslim neighbors. And so the thesis was proposed that Christ must not be represented in an image. Only the sign of the Cross (without a *corpus*) could be, as it were, his seal. Cross or image—that was the choice. In the course of this struggle, the true theology of icons matured and bequeathed us a message that has a profound relevance to us today in the iconographic crisis of the West.

The icon of Christ is the icon of the risen Lord. That truth, with all its implications, now dawned on the Christian mind. There is no *portrait* of the risen Lord. At first the disciples do not recognize him. They have to be led toward a new kind of seeing, in which their eyes are gradually opened from within to the point where they

recognize him afresh and cry out: "It is the Lord!" Perhaps the most telling episode of all is that of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their hearts are transformed, so that, through the outward events of Scripture, they can discern its inward center, from which everything comes and to which everything tends: the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. They then detain their mysterious companion and give him their hospitality, and at the breaking of bread they experience in reverse fashion what happened to Adam and Eve when they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: their eyes are opened. Now they see no longer just the externals but the reality that is not apparent to their senses yet shines through their senses: it is the Lord, now alive in a new way. In the icon, it is not the facial features that count (though icons essentially adhere to the appearance of the *acheiropoietos*). No, what matters is the new kind of seeing. The icon is supposed to originate from an opening up of the inner senses, from a facilitation of sight that gets beyond the surface of the empirical and perceives Christ, as the later theology of icons puts it, in the light of Tabor. It thus leads the man who contemplates it to the point where, through the interior vision that the icon embodies, he beholds in the sensible that which, though above the sensible, has entered into the sphere of the senses. As Evdokimov says so beautifully, the icon requires a "fast from the eyes". Icon painters, he says, must learn how to fast with their eyes and prepare themselves by a long path of prayerful asceticism. This is what marks the transition from art to sacred art.¹ The icon comes from prayer and leads to prayer. It delivers

¹ Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, trans. Steven Bigham (Redondo Beach, Calif.: Oakwood, 1996), 188.

a man from that closure of the senses which perceives only the externals, the material surface of things, and is blind to the transparency of the spirit, the transparency of the Logos. At the most fundamental level, what we are dealing with here is nothing other than the transcendence of faith. The whole problem of knowledge in the modern world is present. If an interior opening-up does not occur in man that enables him to see more than what can be measured and weighed, to perceive the reflection of divine glory in creation, then God remains excluded from our field of vision. The icon, rightly understood, leads us away from false questions about portraits, portraits comprehensible at the level of the senses, and thus enables us to discern the face of Christ and, in him, of the Father. Thus in the icon we find the same spiritual orientations that we discovered previously when emphasizing the eastward direction of the liturgy. The icon is intended to draw us onto an inner path, the eastward path, toward the Christ who is to return. Its dynamism is identical with the dynamism of the liturgy as a whole. Its Christology is trinitarian. It is the Holy Spirit who makes us capable of seeing, he whose work is always to move us toward Christ. "We have drunk deeply of the Spirit," says Saint Athanasius, "and we drink Christ."² This seeing, which teaches us to see Christ, not "according to the flesh", but according to the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 5:16), grants us also a glimpse of the Father himself.

Only when we have understood this interior orientation of the icon can we rightly understand why the Second Council of Nicaea and all the following councils concerned with icons regard it as a confession of faith in the Incarnation and iconoclasm as a denial of the Incar-

² Ibid., 204.

nation, as the summation of all heresies. The Incarnation means, in the first place, that the invisible God enters into the visible world, so that we, who are bound to matter, can know him. In this sense, the way to the Incarnation was already being prepared in all that God said and did in history for man's salvation. But this descent of God is intended to draw us into a movement of ascent. The Incarnation is aimed at man's transformation through the Cross and to the new corporeality of the Resurrection. God seeks us where we are, not so that we stay there, but so that we may come to be where he is, so that we may get beyond ourselves. That is why to reduce the visible appearance of Christ to a "historical Jesus" belonging to the past misses the point of his visible appearance, misses the point of the Incarnation.

The senses are not to be discarded, but they should be expanded to their widest capacity. We see Christ rightly only when we say with Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" We have just established that the icon has a trinitarian scope, and now we must come to terms with its ontological proportions. The Son could only become incarnate as man because man was already planned in advance in relation to him, as the image of him who is in himself the image of God. As Evdokimov again says so strikingly, the light of the first day and the light of the eighth day meet in the icon. Present already in creation is the light that will shine with its full brightness on the eighth day in the Resurrection of the Lord and in the new world, the light that enables us to see the splendor of God. The Incarnation is rightly understood only when it is seen within the broad context of creation, history, and the new world. Only then does it become clear that the senses belong to faith, that the new seeing does not abolish them but leads them to their original

purpose. Iconoclasm rests ultimately on a one-sided apophatic theology, which recognizes only the Wholly Other-ness of the God beyond all images and words, a theology that in the final analysis regards revelation as the inadequate human reflection of what is eternally imperceptible. But if this is the case, faith collapses. Our current form of sensibility, which can no longer apprehend the transparency of the spirit in the senses, almost inevitably brings with it a flight into a purely "negative" (apophatic) theology. God is beyond all thought, and therefore all propositions about him and every kind of image of God are in equal proportions valid and invalid. What seems like the highest humility toward God turns into pride, allowing God no word and permitting him no real entry into history. On the one hand, matter is absolutized and thought of as completely impervious to God, as mere matter, and thus deprived of its dignity. But, as Evdokimov says, there is also an apophatic Yes, not just an apophatic No, the denial of all likeness. Following Gregory Palamas, he emphasizes that in his essence God is radically transcendent, but in his existence he can be, and wants to be, represented as the Living One. God is the Wholly Other, but he is powerful enough to be able to show himself. And he has so fashioned his creature that it is capable of "seeing" him and loving him.

With these reflections we once again make contact with our own times and therefore also the development of liturgy, art, and faith in the Western world. Is this theology of the icon, as developed in the East, true? Is it valid for us? Or is it just a peculiarity of the Christian East? Let us start with the historical facts. In early Christian art, right up to the end of the Romanesque period, in other words, up to the threshold of the thirteenth century, there is no *essential* difference between East and

West with regard to the question of images. True, if we think of Saint Augustine or Saint Gregory the Great, the West emphasized, almost exclusively, the pedagogical function of the image. The so-called *Libri Carolini*, as well as the synods of Frankfurt (794) and Paris (824), came out against the poorly understood Seventh Ecumenical Council, Nicaea II, which canonized the defeat of iconoclasm and the rooting of the icon in the Incarnation. By contrast, the Western synods insist on the purely educative role of the images: "Christ", they said, "did not save us by paintings."³

But the themes and fundamental orientation of iconography remained the same, even though now, in the Romanesque style, plastic art emerges, something that never had a foothold in the East. It is always the risen Christ, even on the Cross, to whom the community looks as the true *Oriens*. And art is always characterized by the unity of creation, Christology, and eschatology: the first day is on its way toward the eighth, which in turn takes up the first. Art is still ordered to the mystery that becomes present in the liturgy. It is still oriented to the heavenly liturgy. The figures of the angels in Romanesque art are essentially no different from those in Byzantine painting. They show that we are joining with the cherubim and seraphim, with all the heavenly powers, in praise of the Lamb. In the liturgy, the curtain between heaven and earth is torn open, and we are taken up into a liturgy that spans the whole cosmos.

With the emergence of Gothic, a change slowly takes place. Much remains the same, especially the fundamental inner correspondence between the Old Testament and the New, which for its part always has a reference to what

³ *Ibid.*, 167.

is still to come. But the central image becomes different. The depiction is no longer of the *Pantocrator*, the Lord of all, leading us into the eighth day. It has been superseded by the image of the crucified Lord in the agony of his Passion and death. The story is told of the historical events of the Passion, but the Resurrection is not made visible. The historical and narrative aspect of art comes to the fore. It has been said that the mystical image has been replaced by the devotional image. Many factors may have been involved in this change of perspective. Evdokimov thinks that the turn from Platonism to Aristotelianism during the thirteenth century played a part. Platonism sees sensible things as shadows of the eternal archetypes. In the sensible we can and should know the archetypes and rise up through the former to the latter. Aristotelianism rejects the doctrine of Ideas. The thing, composed of matter and form, exists in its own right. Through abstraction I discern the species to which it belongs. In place of seeing, by which the super-sensible becomes visible in the sensible, comes abstraction. The relationship of the spiritual and the material has changed and with it man's attitude to reality as it appears to him. For Plato, the category of the beautiful had been definitive. The beautiful and the good, ultimately the beautiful and God, coincide. Through the appearance of the beautiful, we are wounded in our innermost being, and that wound grips us and takes us beyond ourselves; it stirs longing into flight and moves us toward the truly Beautiful, to the Good in itself. Something of this Platonic foundation lives on in the theology of icons, even though the Platonic ideas of the beautiful and of vision have been transformed by the light of Tabor. Moreover, Plato's conception has been profoundly reshaped by the

interconnection of creation, Christology, and eschatology, and the material order as such has been given a new dignity and a new value. This kind of Platonism, transformed as it is by the Incarnation, largely disappears from the West after the thirteenth century, so that now the art of painting strives first and foremost to depict events that have taken place. Salvation history is seen less as a sacrament than as a narrative unfolded in time. Thus the relationship to the liturgy also changes. It is seen as a kind of symbolic reproduction of the event of the Cross. Piety responds by turning chiefly to meditation on the mysteries of the life of Jesus. Art finds its inspiration less in the liturgy than in popular piety, and popular piety is in turn nourished by the historical images in which it can contemplate the way to Christ, the way of Jesus himself, and its continuation in the saints. The separation in iconography between East and West, which took place at the latest by the thirteenth century, doubtless goes very deep: very different themes, different spiritual paths, open up. A devotion to the Cross of a more historicizing kind replaces orientation to the *Oriens*, to the risen Lord who has gone ahead of us.

Nevertheless, we should not exaggerate the differences that developed. True, the depiction of Christ dying in pain on the Cross is something new, but it still depicts him who bore *our* pains, by whose stripes we are healed. In the extremes of pain, it represents the redemptive love of God. Though Grünewald's altarpiece takes the realism of the Passion to a radical extreme, the fact remains that it was an image of consolation. It enabled the plague victims cared for by the Antonians to recognize that God identified with them in their fate, to see that he had descended into their suffering and that their suffering lay

hidden in his. There is a decisive turn to what is human, historical, in Christ, but it is animated by a sense that these human afflictions of his belong to the mystery. The images are consoling, because they make visible the overcoming of our anguish in the incarnate God's sharing of our suffering, and so they bear within them the message of the Resurrection. These images, too, come from prayer, from interior meditation on the way of Christ. They are identifications with Christ, which are based in turn on God's identification with us in Christ. They open up the realism of the mystery without diverging from it. As for the Mass, as the making present of the Cross, do these images not enable us to understand that mystery with a new vividness? The mystery is unfolded in an extremity of concreteness, and popular piety is enabled thereby to reach the heart of the liturgy in a new way. These images, too, do not show just the "surface of the skin", the external sensible world; they, too, are intended to lead us through mere outward appearance and open our eyes to the heart of God. What we are suggesting here about the images of the Cross applies also to all the rest of the "narrative" art of the Gothic style. What power of inward devotion lies in the images of the Mother of God! They manifest the new humanity of the faith. Such images are an invitation to prayer, because they are permeated with prayer from within. They show us the true image of man as planned by the Creator and renewed by Christ. They guide us into man's authentic being. And finally, let us not forget the glorious art of Gothic stained glass! The windows of the Gothic cathedrals keep out the garishness of the light outside, while concentrating that light and using it so that the whole history of God in relation to man, from creation

to the Second Coming, shines through. The walls of the church, in interplay with the sun, become an image in their own right, the iconostasis of the West, lending the place a sense of the sacred that can touch the hearts even of agnostics.

The Renaissance did something quite new. It "emanipated" man. Now we see the development of the "aesthetic" in the modern sense, the vision of a beauty that no longer points beyond itself but is content in the end with itself, the beauty of the appearing thing. Man experiences himself in his autonomy, in all his grandeur. Art speaks of this grandeur of man almost as if it were surprised by it; it needs no other beauty to seek. There is often scarcely a difference between the depictions of pagan myths and those of Christian history. The tragic burden of antiquity has been forgotten; only its divine beauty is seen. A nostalgia for the gods emerges, for myth, for a world without fear of sin and without the pain of the Cross, which had perhaps been too overpowering in the images of the late Middle Ages. True, Christian subjects are still being depicted, but such "religious art" is no longer sacred art in the proper sense. It does not enter into the humility of the sacraments and their time-transcending dynamism. It wants to enjoy today and to bring redemption through beauty itself. Perhaps the iconoclasm of the Reformation should be understood against this background, though doubtless its roots were extensive.

Baroque art, which follows the Renaissance, has many different aspects and modes of expression. In its best form, it is based on the reform of the Church set in motion by the Council of Trent. In line with the tradition of the West, the council again emphasized the didactic and pedagogical character of art, but, as a fresh start toward

interior renewal, it led once more to a new kind of seeing that comes from and returns within. The altarpiece is like a window through which the world of God comes out to us. The curtain of temporality is raised, and we are allowed a glimpse into the inner life of the world of God. This art is intended to insert us into the liturgy of heaven. Again and again, we experience a Baroque church as a unique kind of *fortissimo* of joy, an Alleluia in visual form. "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh 8:10). These words from the Old Testament express the basic emotion that animates this iconography. The Enlightenment pushed faith into a kind of intellectual and even social ghetto. Contemporary culture turned away from the faith and trod another path, so that faith took flight in historicism, the copying of the past, or else attempted compromise or lost itself in resignation and cultural abstinence. The last of these led to a new iconoclasm, which has frequently been regarded as virtually mandated by the Second Vatican Council. The destruction of images, the first signs of which reach back to the 1920s, eliminated a lot of *kitsch* and unworthy art, but ultimately it left behind a void, the wretchedness of which we are now experiencing in a truly acute way.

Where do we go from here? Today we are experiencing, not just a crisis of sacred art, but a crisis of art in general of unprecedented proportions. The crisis of art for its part is a symptom of the crisis of man's very existence. The immense growth in man's mastery of the material world has left him blind to the questions of life's meaning that transcend the material world. We might almost call it a blindness of the spirit. The questions of how we ought to live, how we can overcome death, whether existence has a purpose and what it is—to all these questions there

is no longer a common answer. Positivism, formulated in the name of scientific seriousness, narrows the horizon to what is verifiable, to what can be proved by experiment; it renders the world opaque. True, it still contains mathematics, but the *logos* that is the presupposition of this mathematics and its applicability is no longer evident. Thus our world of images no longer surpasses the bounds of sense and appearance, and the flood of images that surrounds us really means the end of the image. If something cannot be photographed, it cannot be seen. In this situation, the art of the icon, sacred art, depending as it does on a wider kind of seeing, becomes impossible. What is more, art itself, which in impressionism and expressionism explored the extreme possibilities of the sense of sight, becomes literally object-less. Art turns into experimenting with self-created worlds, empty "creativity", which no longer perceives the *Creator Spiritus*, the Creator Spirit. It attempts to take his place, and yet, in so doing, it manages to produce only what is arbitrary and vacuous, bringing home to man the absurdity of his role as creator.

Again we must ask: Where do we go from here? Let us try to sum up what we have said so far and to identify the fundamental principles of an art ordered to divine worship.

1. The complete absence of images is incompatible with faith in the Incarnation of God. God has acted in history and entered into our sensible world so that it may become transparent to him. Images of beauty, in which the mystery of the invisible God becomes visible, are an essential part of Christian worship. There will always be ups and downs in the history of iconography, upsurge and decline, and therefore periods when images

are somewhat sparse. But they can never be totally lacking. Iconoclasm is not a Christian option.

2. Sacred art finds its subjects in the images of salvation history, beginning with creation and continuing all the way from the first day to the eighth day, the day of the resurrection and Second Coming, in which the line of human history will come full circle. The images of biblical history have pride of place in sacred art, but the latter also includes the history of the saints, which is an unfolding of the history of Jesus Christ, the fruit borne throughout history by the dead grain of wheat. "You are not struggling against icons", said Saint John Damascene to the iconoclastic emperor Leo III, "but against the saints." In the same period, and with the same view in mind, Pope Saint Gregory III instituted in Rome the feast of All Saints.⁴

3. The images of the history of God in relation to man do not merely illustrate the succession of past events but display the inner unity of God's action. In this way, they have a reference to the sacraments, above all, to Baptism and the Eucharist, and, in pointing to the sacraments, they are contained within them. Images thus point to a presence; they are essentially connected with what happens in the liturgy. Now history becomes sacrament in Christ, who is the source of the sacraments. Therefore, the icon of Christ is the center of sacred iconography. The center of the icon of Christ is the Paschal Mystery: Christ is presented as the Crucified, the risen Lord, the One who will come again and who here and now hiddenly reigns over all. Every image of Christ must contain these three essential aspects of the mystery of Christ and, in this sense, must be an image of Easter. At the same

⁴ Ibid., 164.

time, it goes without saying that different emphases are possible. The image may give more prominence to the Cross, the Passion, and in the Passion to the anguish of our own life today, or again it may bring the Resurrection or the Second Coming to the fore. But whatever happens, one aspect can never be completely isolated from another, and in the different emphases the Paschal Mystery as a whole must be plainly evident. An image of the Crucifixion no longer transparent to Easter would be just as deficient as an Easter image forgetful of the wounds and the suffering of the present moment. And, centered as it is on the Paschal Mystery, the image of Christ is always an icon of the Eucharist, that is, it points to the sacramental presence of the Easter mystery.

4. The image of Christ and the images of the saints are not photographs. Their whole point is to lead us beyond what can be apprehended at the merely material level, to awaken new senses in us, and to teach us a new kind of seeing, which perceives the Invisible in the visible. The sacredness of the image consists precisely in the fact that it comes from an interior vision and thus leads us to such an interior vision. It must be a fruit of contemplation, of an encounter in faith with the new reality of the risen Christ, and so it leads us in turn into an interior gazing, an encounter in prayer with the Lord. The image is at the service of the liturgy. The prayer and contemplation in which the images are formed must, therefore, be a praying and seeing undertaken in communion with the seeing faith of the Church. The ecclesial dimension is essential to sacred art and thus has an essential connection with the history of the faith, with Scripture and tradition.

5. The Church in the West does not need to disown the specific path she has followed since about the thirteenth

century. But she must achieve a real reception of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Nicaea II, which affirmed the fundamental importance and theological status of the image in the Church. The Western Church does not need to subject herself to all the individual norms concerning images that were developed at the councils and synods of the East, coming to some kind of conclusion in 1551 at the Council of Moscow, the Council of the Hundred Canons. Nevertheless, she should regard the fundamental lines of this theology of the image in the Church as normative for her. There must, of course, be no rigid norms. Freshly received intuitions and the ever-new experiences of piety must find a place in the Church. But still there is a difference between sacred art (which is related to the liturgy and belongs to the ecclesial sphere) and religious art in general. There cannot be completely free expression in sacred art. Forms of art that deny the *logos* of things and imprison man within what appears to the senses are incompatible with the Church's understanding of the image. No sacred art can come from an isolated subjectivity. No, it presupposes that there is a subject who has been inwardly formed by the Church and opened up to the "we". Only thus does art make the Church's common faith visible and speak again to the believing heart. The freedom of art, which is also necessary in the more narrowly circumscribed realm of sacred art, is not a matter of do-as-you-please. It unfolds according to the measure indicated by the first four points in these concluding reflections, which are an attempt to sum up what is constant in the iconographic tradition of faith. Without faith, there is no art commensurate with the liturgy. Sacred art stands beneath the imperative stated in the second epistle to the Corinthians. Gazing at the Lord, we are "changed into his likeness from one degree

of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (3:18).

But what does all this mean practically? Art cannot be "produced", as one contracts out and produces technical equipment. It is always a gift. Inspiration is not something one can choose for oneself. It has to be received, otherwise it is not there. One cannot bring about a renewal of art in faith by money or through commissions. Before all things, it requires the gift of a new kind of seeing. And so it would be worth our while to regain a faith that sees. Wherever that exists, art finds its proper expression.