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Icons: Are They Idols?

The Challenge of Using Icons in Worship in a Multi-Denominational Christian Context

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Abstract

As long as we remained within the Orthodox Church circles, worshiping and studying, there was no clear explanation on what icons stands for, or are meant to be. It was after venturing into theological training, at a Protestant ecumenical University, that the challenge of understanding icons was unveiled. Historically, Iconoclasm, a medieval period controversy, led to a schism in the Church and persecutions of the iconodules. Apparently, the persecutions did not bring to an end the question whether icons were idols or not. Listening to the public crusades by Protestant churches, it is not uncommon to hear condemnation of icons, especially from the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. This research article sets on the premise that if transcendentalism, as developed by John Macquarrie and Bernard Lonergan, is used to explain the use of icons in worship, the meaning and use of icons will be understood and thus appreciated in a multi-denominational context. The research was both field and library based. In field research, non-probability sampling was used and data collected was tabulated using nvivo tools.

Key words: Icons. Iconoclasts. Iconodules. Transcendental. Idolatry. Symbols. Revelation.

1.1 Introduction

Kenya is a pluralistic society with many denominations drawn especially from the protestant wing. These evangelical-protestant denominations regard icons as idols, and also sees the act of having them in church as idolatry. They, therefore, teach their members against associating themselves with those that use them because they have the potential of 'polluting' and desecrating their true faith in God. On the other hand, the Orthodox Church encourages its members to have icons hung in their respective homes, offices, and business premises. They also have crucifix hung on their necks, which bear the image of Christ and also that of Mary. In view of this, they are met with a lot of opposition from their neighbors and friends whom they come across in their daily encounters. When children go to schools while wearing some small icons, they are treated under suspicion by their fellow students at school. At businesses or workplaces, those icons appear as charms to boost their businesses against their competitors, something which their protestant neighbors take with a lot of superstition. The first missionaries to Kenya were from the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Africa Inland Missions (AIM), Church of Scotland Missions (CSM), and later the Roman Catholicism

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(Gathogo 2010). The Orthodox Church came to Kenya much later; in fact there are parts of the country that have not encountered the Orthodox Church. The protestant outfits condemned the use of icons. Therefore, the challenge on the use of icons by the Catholic Church and Orthodox Churches found an already charged ground against the use of icons. Certainly, the negative attitude towards the use of icons in worship impacts negatively on the mission of the Orthodox Church in Kenya.

This research article aims at correcting the wrong notion of icons in the churches that are opposed to their use in their respective liturgies. The article surveys past efforts by those that support the use of icons (iconophiles) to counter the opposition by those that oppose the use of them (iconoclasts) and evaluates their successes and failures. Noting that resistance towards the use of icons in the church still abounds, this research article proposes a new approach to understanding the icons. It proposes that if transcendental approach, as advanced by John Macquarrie, an Anglican priest, and Bernard Lonergan is applied to create an understanding of icons, the condemnation on the use of icons will be lessened. It achieves this by describing transcendental method, and showing how it works, and how it would work in this question. It evaluates the pastoral practical implication of this methodology in the context of evangelism in the mission of the Orthodox Church in Kenya.

2. 1 Protestant Attitude towards use of icons

Christianity is a faith that originated from Judaism; a religion with strict monotheism. In the Old Testament, the Bible teaches against the use of images. In Exodus 20:4, the Bible states: "You shall not make for yourself a carved 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. You shall not bow down to them or serve them..." In the Reformation Study Bible, carved image is explained as follows:

The term means something hewn from wood or stone. The prohibited image may be that of the Lord, since other deities have been excluded by v. 2, though the qualifying words 'any likeness of anything' suggest that pagan idols may be in view. Israel is to be distinguished from the nations by worship that does not make use of images of God...³

The iconoclasts contend that since the Old Testament teaches against the use of images, they regard it as a violation of the Decalogue.⁴ They argue that since Christianity is founded on Judaism, the prohibition by God of not having anything as a representation of Him should or applies to the Christian as well (Gathogo 2013). Therefore, having icons in places of worship is not only breaking the Decalogue but also evidence of idol worship which they strongly condemn. These protestant churches teach their members to disassociate themselves from those who venerate or use icons.

John Calvin is one of the founders of the protestant movements of the sixteenth century and whose influence is evident right into the twenty-first century through his teachings. In Henry Beveridge's (2011) book, *John Calvin: The Institute of the Christian Religion*, a translation by Henry Beveridge 2008, he believed that man in his sinfulness is short of knowing God. This lack of knowing God has made him desperately desire to come up with ways that will satisfy his desire to know God. In this delusion, he has made up gods of his own which are in no way the real God. He concludes this by saying that, since man in his weakness cannot comprehend God, neither can he make a representation of Him as argued by the iconophiles. Therefore, in trying to use icons to point to God is a deformation of the understanding of God. He thus teaches Christians to desist from this gross misconduct which is also a distortion of true worship. Thus, for Calvin, Icons were idols, and those who use them are idol worshipers. He further argues that they should not be used in Christian homes since they put one in danger of worshiping them instead of God (Beveridge 2011). Another protestant who was against icons is Ellen G. White (1888) a nineteenth century theologian. In turn, Ellen Gould White (1827-1915) was an American author and co-founder of the Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) Church. She founded SDA Church along with other Adventists such as James White (her husband), and Joseph Bates (White 1888).

³ The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version, R.C. Sproul (Gen. Ed.)

⁴ It is worthwhile to recall that the Decalogue is also referred to as the Ten Commandments. Put it differently, they are a set of biblical principles relating to ethics and worship that play a fundamental role in Judaism and Christianity. Significantly, the text of the Ten Commandments appears twice in the Hebrew Bible (that is, at Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21).

Since iconophiles trace this practice from the first centuries, she then bases her debate against icons by giving a historical development of their worship. Focusing especially on the Fourth Century, during the time of Emperor Constantine the great, Ellen G. White (1888) argues that it is this time in particular, and, due to the freedom of worship for Christians pronounced by the emperor that a group of people joined the church from paganism. As they were joining, they came with their pagan ways of worship; and in turn, their pagan worship icons were used. When this happened, White (1888) argues further that, those who were true believers (the iconoclast) were forced to fight against this practice. It was their efforts and boldness that made them enemies of iconophiles who termed and declared them heretics. In their bid to confuse a number of people, these idolaters/iconophiles developed unbiblical doctrines which they termed as holy traditions, though they were an abomination and falsehood. It was, in simple, idolatry that was disguised as sacred. White (1888) further argued that all this ended up messing the true church and worship. In this understanding, the iconophiles substituted true worship with this idol worship to welcome many pagans among them.

In the foregoing, there has been an attitude against the use of icons among many protestant churches in the 21st century. Wharton (2014) calls it 'modern protestant animosity' directed at icons and icons use by the evangelical-protestant churches. This serves as a sign of how detestable this practice is in the eyes of those protestant Christian traditions. A section of Protestant churches argue further that, icon veneration leads to idolatry (Meyer, 2010). This becomes the general feeling in many of those communities or societies where Protestantism dominates. Therefore, it becomes very difficult for a denomination that is different from them to practice freely and genuinely. This is exactly the position that the Orthodox Church in Kenya finds itself.

It is further noted by Wharton (2014) that Evangelical-Protestants seek a direct relationship with God without requiring any intermediaries. For this reason, they hate and detest icons that they believe come between people and the divine. Vallikiv (2011) argues further that, Protestants believe that icons are capable of becoming demonic presence by themselves. So, to have them is to attract demons to those who use them. Due to this, campaigns are done through crusades where icons are openly and publicly condemned. It is on this premise that Sunason (2019) argues that, "therefore, these Protestants isolate others who use icons, regarding them as religious others." This means that they do not interact with them in any way, which is the order of their teachings and general practices of their ecclesiastical outfits. Their followers are told to isolate those who are not like them on matters of worship.

2. 2 Effects of Protestant Attitude on Worship in Iconophiles

Clement (1899) argues that icons are images or pictures that are used for prayers. They are said to have been in use since early church times. Therefore, the Orthodox Church argues that it was present during Jesus' time and that also his disciples observed them. The early church fathers are also believed to have supported this practice even though some were opposed to it. It is well known that during Christ's time the image use was so flourishing within the Roman Empire and therefore having them also in the church was possible. According to Ouspensky (1982), the Orthodox Church, a strong believer and supporter of the seven ecumenical council's resolutions embraces icons in her worship as well. Various authors state that entering an Orthodox Church, the entire church is full of icons. There is especially, a wall called iconostasis that separates the main church (nave), from the holy altar. On this wall, icons are hung on it arranged in a particular pattern. Right from the middle or loyal door also known as the holy door. On the right side of this door, the first icon is that of Christ the saviour, on the left is that of Mary the mother of God. On the left is that of the patron Saint of that particular church next to the one of Theotokos. On the right next to that of Christ is the icon of St John the forerunner. On the small doors called northern and southern doors which lead into the Altar, mostly are hanged the icons of Archangel Gabriel and Michael respectively.

Tradigo (2006: 6) continues to state that, on the top of the church inside the dome we have the icon of Christ, also known as the Pantocrator. From the top to the bottom, they follow a pattern, starting with those of the angels, then the prophets of the Old Testament, and then the other saints in that order. In our respective homes, Orthodox Christians have a prayer corner where they place icons. These icons can be that of Christ, then Mary the mother of God (theotokos), and most especially the one for the patron saints whom members have named after. If a prayer is not there, then these icons are hung on the walls of the house. The same applies to the business premises and offices too.

To honor icons and more so to remember and celebrate what the church calls the Victory over the iconoclasts, the Orthodox Church has dedicated the Sunday before great lent which is known as the Sunday of Orthodoxy. It is among the greatest feast days celebrated every year. On this day, Orthodox Christians all over the world walk-in procession carrying icons and chanting hymns of victory (Jaroslav, 2014: 134). However, with the attitude of the protestant against icons, the Orthodox Church members face a lot of difficulties in genuinely practicing this. They are faced with criticisms from those protestant members whose denominations do not use icons. Since these denominations are the majority in Kenya, as we saw, terming this practice idol worship, therefore, when Orthodox Members try to practice their faith, they always appear as an apostate and idolatrous religion.

As we have demonstrated so far, these protestant denominations teach their members to treat the Orthodox Church like 'religious others' and sees them as not truly Christians. Suneson (2019: 134) cites an example in India where the users of icons are isolated by other Christian movements. The following are some of the responses to an interview carried out among some Orthodox members concerning this problem. Peter Kamau (cited in Suneson 2019: 134) is an orthodox member by birth, he claimed that Orthodox Church appears as a cult to some of his friends from the protestant denominations. They accuse him of following a cult by having icons in his house and also worshiping them. This made him feel a bit shy and wondered whether it is appropriate to have icons anyway. He continued to say that, was it not for his love for his orthodox faith he could have changed his faith. He feels isolated from them an action that Sunason (2019: 134, 250) calls protestant isolation.

Peter (cited in Suneson 2019: 134) like many other members of the Orthodox Church was finding it difficult to practice his faith genuinely by having icons at homes, offices, and business premises as is expected of him by the church. This, therefore, shows how the protestant attitude against icons is affecting the Orthodox Church negatively. Icons are associated with creating fear of idolatry in the members of protestant denominations where they even fear seeing them or coming near them. Vallikiv (2011) observes that protestant people consider icons to be dangerous and have the potential of becoming demonic presence. This causes them to keep distance from them and also from those people and churches that are having them.

Rev. Fr. George Kiruba (personal communication, 23 June 2021) has been a member of the Orthodox Church for over 60 years after converting from Presbyterian Church. Having served for over 30 years, he gave his experience on this problem which he has encountered so many times. Currently running a small mission church in Maasai land, he lamented how it has been difficult to do mission work among these people. Giving a scenario, where people (not of Orthodox tradition) could gather outside the church pointing fingers toward the icons inside. He later came to learn that this was due to their belief that icons were idols and that the church was said to be an idol worshipping church. Dickson Inyambukhu is a teacher by profession, born and raised in Orthodox Church. According to him, this claim that icons are idols was directed to him by his neighbors from the protestant denomination. But he appreciated the catechetical classes he underwent at Sts Anogroi Valley Road (in Nairobi) where he used to fellowship. These classes according to him gave him knowledge of what icons are and how they are used and therefore it does not bother him when their accusations are raised (Vallikiv, 2011:75).

Another challenge comes when an orthodox member has to marry from these denominations and vice versa. It becomes very hard for a member of those denominations to convert and follow the Orthodox Church practice as they are very much oriented in their previous beliefs. Sunason (2014) argues that some who join the Orthodox Church after marrying an already member of the church, they come with a superstitious attitude towards icons from their backgrounds. An example is Keziah, who was born and raised in Kenya Assemblies of God, a protestant church and one which does not use icons. She is married to Isaac an Orthodox member by birth and during their pre-marital counseling; she opened up about her fear that icons are idols according to what she grew up knowing. Nevertheless, with time and through teachings she came to understand and appreciate that icons are not idols (Sunason, 2014:170).

Therefore, having neighbors, workmates, the school mates, or even friends who treat you as religious others make it difficult to worship freely. Therefore, as Dickson Inyambukhu said, there is much need for proper knowledge given to people concerning icons and their use. This article is aimed at being a source of that knowledge to those who

are opposed to use of icons in worship. It will help them understand why and how to use icons and demonstrate that they are symbols of revelation and not idols.

2. 3. Evaluation of Past Efforts to end Negative Attitude towards the Use of Icons

The controversy on use of icons in the Church is not a new phenomenon; it is an 8th century issue yet despite attempts by the iconophiles to explain what icons are and why they should be used in worship, the controversy has persisted. For example at the seventh ecumenical council banking on St John of Damascus Apologist used the icons to show the role of material in salvation. Scholars like Pallis (2015) have used the Christological approach and the doctrine of incarnation where icons have been used with the emphasis being on the role of human nature of Christ in salvation. This was first introduced by St John of Damascus who used it against the iconoclasts in the 9th century. Strezova (2013: 236-237) and Apotolache (2017), have used icons as pedagogical tools where icons serve in educating the observer. Through icons, this role has been achieved since the early church days when the catacombs were decorated with Christian symbols. Still, the Orthodox Church uses this method to teach its people even today.

Still in this teaching approach, Evdokimov (2006) argues further that, icons are used to reveal historical events of redemption through Christ. This is achieved by transcending one to the historical events and time when those events happened. This makes the observer have a glimpse of what reality as if it is happening now. Agreeing with (Lloyd, 2013) is Tradigo (2006: 6) who takes icons to be the windows to the kingdom of heaven. They both argue that icons are the physical materials of divine presence. They teach that icons represent the other world or the heavenly world through which, serving as widows allows the observer to look and experience that unchanging reality due to their mystical connectedness to their prototypes. They further argue that, as open windows to heaven, they are the presentation of the transcendental reality and spiritual immanence in the material world (Lloyd, 2013:1-3).

Despite these approaches among many others, this problem persists with the iconoclasts still accusing this practice to be idol worship. We have already noted that despite the iconoclastic controversies being resolved in the various Church councils, it is still showings its ugly head. This presents the iconophiles with the challenge and need to explain this doctrine now and again. In other words, attempt to elucidate what icons are and why they should be used in the Church are on-going. There is much need for an approach that will help the iconoclasts to appreciate icons even if they prefer not to use them. It is hoped that if the iconoclasts understood the meaning and application of icons in worship, they will not be hostile to those churches that use them and this will reduce the anxiety caused among the iconophile Christians. We hope that the approach of transcendentalism will serve this purpose.

3. Transcendentalism

According to Macquarrie (1977: 60), in the transcendentalism method, it is believed that the world's knowledge exists in segments, discontinuity and incompleteness. To therefore have full knowledge, man has to seek and join these segments to create a continuity that will make meaning. On this premise, therefore, transcendentalism is a philosophical method in which man through his mind goes beyond the segment which is available and joins it with what is hidden beyond. It can also be said to be the capacity of seeing beyond what is perceived by our senses Macquarie (1972:1). Mueller (1984) explains how Bernard Lonergan understands transcendentalism. He says that in this process man can gain knowledge through self-consciousness. How is this possible? These two scholars (Macquarrie and Lonergan) argue that, by focusing on man's ability to creatively rise above this life (segment) to look beyond what is perceivable or immanent, then, setting focus on what is hidden beyond one is able to gain knowledge of the invisible. In this method, these scholars agree that man is the one who objectifies any object in question. J. M. Kiboi (2022:158) in agreement with this argues that, man is the authority that gives an object the status it occupies. It can be concluded therefore that, for an icon to be an idol or not, it all depends on the mind of the one who is observing it. He or she sets the boundaries or fails to set them, therefore, making that object to be the final in itself or not Kiboi (2022: 158).

3. 1. Discussion

Both Macquarrie (1972) and Lonergan (1972) agree that the method is based on the functionality of the human mind as the arena in which the whole process begins and ends. For a man to transcend, the law of nature is not a factor

to be considered since man focuses on what is inside of him rather than what is outside of him. Here, the thing which is inside man is the spirit that allows man to be creative and responsible to rise above Kiboi (2012: 158). (Lonergan, 1972) calls this spirit, the mind, which works through the basic pattern employed in the cognitive process. Through this process, man reflects and by reflecting, objectifies himself hence, deciding what he is and what he wants to become as self-knowledge.

Further, Mueller (1984) states that the strength of this methodology lies in the fact that, it is a deliberate process. This is where man deliberately intends what to know and to what extent this knowledge. Without this deliberate move by the subject, there is no known knowledge that can be revealed. Macquarie argues that freely man can use his capabilities to set the boundaries, deciding as to what extent he should transcend through self-reflection. Further, for this method to work, man must visit the historical experiences from which known knowledge is built. It is agreed that, man's life revolves around historical events of his ancestors that shape his life. By reflecting or visiting these histories, one transcends or goes beyond the current events, time and space and is connected with time, events, and space that belong to the past, and, through which, one grasps the actual meaning of life. Mueller (1984) calls this, the 'experienced experience', as it is used in this research article.

Even though this stands out as the weakness of this methodology, as we have identified, unless an explanation is given about the icons and the story surrounding them, he/she may not tell where they are pointing to. Now the question that can be asked is whether the Orthodox Church has done enough to explain the stories behind every icon, to the people, so that they can see that beyondness as it is expected. If proper information is not given about them, they will certainly fall into the danger of making an icon as a final entity on its own. As Tillich (1959: 63) argues, if an icon fails to point beside itself, then it becomes an idol by becoming the ultimate thing of concern to the believer. It is when the believer's ultimate concern is beyond the icon that the icon becomes a pointer and not an idol. The gaze given by the worshiper is directed to God behind the icon and not to the icon itself.

Kiboi (2022:158) in his book, *Election & Reprobation: A Christian Quest for Certainty of Salvation*, explains transcendentalism in the following words:

Transcendentalism is the teaching that human beings have the ability to transcend their being. By raising their spirits, they behold the spiritual realms. Therefore, in raising their spirits and God descending in the person of Jesus Christ (incarnation), Christ the God/man becomes the meeting point between God and human beings.

Using this understanding, we are arguing that icons, are mere aids that help the human spirit to focus on God the ultimate object of our worship. They are not end in themselves; the gaze is directed to something beyond them unlike idols which the gazer sets his or her all to them as final. The authors of this article have developed the following analogy of a wristwatch to explain the above concept. A wristwatch is used to point to time even though we know very well that it is not time itself. If an example is given of a community in place X that has never heard nor seen a wristwatch before. Then someone from place P where wristwatch is known and used happens to visit this place X. As they interact, the person from place P looking on his/her wrist tells what time it is with exact accuracy of people of place X, two things might happen. First, people from X being in amazement by this person from P and this gadget might call him or her, a magician. Then they will view the wristwatch as a magic ending to treat this person and the wristwatch superstitiously. Our conclusion here is that the reaction from people of place P is because, they did not have knowledge that such a gadget exists, and therefore, they do not have experienced experience. So they are seeing the wristwatch as their first experience. If efforts are made to teach them about a wristwatch, and they deliberately desire to learn and use it, they will stop treating it superstitiously. Still, if they are taught about it and still decide not to use it, they will no longer treat it as a magic thing. Teaching here is important as (Mueller (1984) argues. Thus, first experience is not enough to make a sound conclusion. For one to know what it is and how to use it, one requires to be taught.

3. 2. Methodological Considerations

From its outset, this research article sought to introduce a method that will help the iconoclasts understand the meaning of icons and their role in worship. Transcendentalism has been found as the most appropriate method of achieving this purpose. According to Kiboi (2022), Macquarrie (1972), Mueller (1984) and Nyaundi (2015), this method is a process of elevating the minds beyond what is visible towards what is hidden, for one to get the hidden knowledge

that is required. It also calls for the seeker of knowledge to hold onto the available segment and then use it to seek the other missing half. This is based on the argument that man must rely on experienced experience to transcend. This method, therefore, takes icons as the experienced experience which is the beginning point for the seeker of knowledge. For this method to work, it requires the person seeking knowledge to have enough background information about an icon and what it is pointing towards. Just as the wristwatch analogy used in this article, those who know of the existence of a wristwatch could not treat it with superstition as did those who didn't have this information Mueller (1984: 9). This methodology, therefore, calls for those who are to use icons first to understand what they are and what each icon is pointing towards, by so doing, the seeker will be able to focus on what is beyond that icon and hence benefit from it.

This means, when enough background information about the icon is provided, the minds of the one who observes develops a desire to have more knowledge (question) and by so doing, the mind is lifted beyond the icon to what is behind it. Icons, therefore, participate here as the bearer of that experienced experience which becomes the starting point or what Lloyd (2013: 3) calls the doors and the windows through which one looks. It is on this premise that an icon becomes a pointer to a beyond that is behind and through which it connects the one who gazes, with the heavenly reality.

Since Maquarrie (1972: 3) has argued further that, this method places humanity as the determiner or the objectifier of the object, this means that man determines and dictates what to see and how to interpret. In our argument, human beings are the ones who can make an icon to be an idol or not. They are therefore capable of deciding whether the homage they pay to icons is worship or not worship similar to the one given to God. But this is made possible after they have background information concerning the symbols in question and how they are interpreted. The iconoclast, therefore, might end up objectifying icons as idols through their fear which is not well informed, while the iconophiles, who have the right information, use them appropriately just as pointers without turning them into idols. This demonstrates that icons are like sign posts that point towards a place or a thing. One looking at a sign post knows that it is not the end but the end lies in whatever it points at.

The Orthodox Church has been using icons as the bearer of information which is the experienced experience to trigger the minds to transcend. When the icon is gazed at, it is full of knowledge although this knowledge is not complete. It makes the minds desire to seek more knowledge. As Lloyd (2013: 3) argues, when the mind transcends, they connect or view that missing segment of information and in the process, knowledge is made complete, this complete information is what we call revelation. So we can therefore argue that icons are symbols that are used to transcend the minds to get a revelation about God. Just as Jesus is the true revealer of the Father and His Cross reveals the Father's love for humankind, icons point towards the specific revelation it stands for. Gazing at the Cross of Christ lifts up the mind and spirit of the one gazing to comprehend that love of God in Christ at the Cross.

4. Pastoral and Practical Implication of the New Methodology

We have demonstrated that to transcend, icons as symbols play a very important role by triggering the minds of the one who seeks revelation. The transcendence process requires enough and appropriate background information concerning that symbol in question. The background information helps it to point beyond it, a characteristic required to show that an object is not the ultimate concern by being an end in itself. Any object that does not point beyond it becomes the object of the ultimate concern, therefore becoming an idol (Tillich, 1959:63). Therefore, the practical implication of this transcendental method when used will help those who accuse the Orthodox Church of idolatry, treating icons as an idol to have proper knowledge about this. They might be in danger of idolatry by treating icons as idols, something which the Orthodox Church is safe from due to the information they already have (Macquarie, 1972, 3). Applying this method, helps in appreciating the role of icons participating in the revelation of God. This will make the iconoclasts appreciate them and even if they do not use them, stop the habit of viewing them as idols. Therefore it will also be easier for the Orthodox Church members to practice their faith genuinely without fear of being isolated and accused of idolatry by their neighbors.

5. Conclusion

On the whole, we appreciate that God has revealed Himself to His creation - humans *a priori* and *a posteriori*. *A posteriori* revelation is through his created order and through observing creation. Through an analogy, human beings are able to comprehend God and His nature. Icons are visible elements through which human beings can raise their spirits to appropriate God's revelation by gazing at them. Thus, icons are not the end in themselves but means that aid in worship. Just as the elements of the Eucharist raises worshippers' hearts to the Lord and receives the graces they signifies, icons are visible elements by which a believer raises their spirits and communes with God. Certainly, a religious icon is a soul window, an entrance into the presence of the Holy God. It is these Icons that serve as welcoming objects and/or invitations to the sacred space, as they invite us to keep our eyes open as we pray. It is Christ's wisdom that once cautioned that: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (Mt. 7:1-4). In dismissing Icons as Satanic, we miss the chance to study their theo-ecclesial importance in the life of an individual-believer and the larger society that professes the God of Christendom. If we embrace plurality and/or diversity as God's economy for the world, we have every reason to listen to 'Others', for if they are not against us, they are for us (Mk.9:38-41).

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