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CREATION AND INCARNATION IN THE ICONOLOGY OF ST. JOHN OF DAMASCUS

BY

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'Because man is made in the image and likeness of God, there is something divine about painting an icon.'¹ With these words, St. Theodore the Studite epitomises the orthodox theology of art. God, the primordial artist, creates man from nothing as reflection of his own beauty and wisdom, and implants in him something of his own creative mind. Hence the desire of man through the ages to impose form and meaning on the material world around him.

Under the Old Dispensation of the Law, it was forbidden to make an image of the invisible God. But when God himself became man for our sake in the person of Christ, recreating the divine image in the flesh, then it became not only permissible but desirable to celebrate the saving Incarnation by a work of human art, the icon. In such an image, man, the restored image of God, creates an image of the One who is the image of God *par excellence*, Christ the Word, and thereby vindicates afresh the sacramental capacity of matter to become a vehicle for spirit.

The purpose of the present paper, which is dedicated with respectful and affectionate homage to Archbishop Methodios on his Jubilee, is to trace the development of the ideas outlined above in the thought of St. John of Damascus. It was John who in the eighth century produced the first really sustained defence of Christian religious art, giving the icon cult at last a necessary theological context in the doctrines of creation and incarnation, which are themes of this *Festschrift*. To recall the minds of Orthodox to his teaching is to make explicit what is perennially and centrally involved in their devotion to the icons of Christ and his saints; and it may also be salutary to remind Christians of the West that the theology of the icon is part of the ecumenical

teaching of the Universal Church, as enshrined in the decrees of the second Nicene Council.

First, we should put the achievement of Damascene in historical perspective, by recalling that the creation of Christian art substantially predates the emergence of an associated theological apologetic. Indeed, we have no evidence of Christian works of art at all before the third century (Dura Europos, the Roman catacombs); and the veto against graven images in the Old Testament², and the need for churchmen to combat the cult-images of the pagans, sufficiently explains why visual art is the last major aspect of the classical cultural tradition to be baptised into the church³. However, the existence of sacred art in places of Christian initiation, worship and burial in the century before and after Constantine itself suggests that there was no general antipathy to religious art at that time⁴.

The first positive notices of art in church literature are not until the Cappadocian Fathers, who refer to the power of art to elicit religious emotions and to make us

2. In the Decalogue (Ex. XX. 4; cf. *Deut.* IV. 9, 8-17), and often reiterated by the prophets.

3. By the 2nd cent., the Greek Apologists were using Greek literary traditions and philosophical thought-forms to commend their faith to their educated contemporaries. It cannot be claimed that art was a primordial part of Eastern Christian culture, which has always had reservations about religious sculpture in the round.

4. Sister Charles Murray has argued that there was *no* hostility to religious art in the Early Church (J.T.S., XXVII. 2, 1977). In my view, she overstates her case, as I hope to show in a forthcoming monograph. I would prefer to see Byzantine iconoclasm as the radical expression of a long tradition of Christian scrupulosity and depreciation (if not outright hostility) to art, beginning with Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria. In the third and fourth centuries, unambiguously positive attitudes to religious art are very rare in Christian literature and outweighed by negative responses (although these could not have been typical).

1. *Antirrheticus* III. ii. 5, P.G. XCIX, 420A.

empathise with the exploits and sufferings of those depicted. Gregory of Nyssa in one passage also equates image with scripture (art as a 'speaking book')⁵, and Nilus of Ancyra commends the use of art to edify the illiterate⁶; but in fact the vindication of art as a teaching-aid is much more typical of the patristic West (Paulinus of Nola⁷, Gregory the Great⁸) than of the East⁹. In any case, the paedagogic argument only applies to narrative art, not to individual iconic representations.

Evidence of the latter as foci of personal piety also first appears in the fourth century. Gregory Nazianzus relates the conversion of a prostitute by the image of St. Polemon ('she... was filled with shame before the holy man, depicted as if he were alive')¹⁰, and John Chrysostom tells of the eagerness of citizens of Antioch to honour commemorative portraits of their beloved bishop Meletius¹¹. It is Damascene himself who tells us how Chrysostom kept an icon of St. Paul on his desk, 'and when he studied the Epistles at night, the picture seemed to come alive and speak to him.'¹² In such references, we clearly see the emergence of the icon-cult as such, and the use of images, not only to tell a story or to inculcate a moral, but to mediate a presence and to provide a point of encounter with the holy. I have argued elsewhere¹³ that the cult of the saints (especially the martyrs, and their spiritual successors the ascetics) provided the prime growing point of what Kitzinger has called the 'potentiated image'¹⁴. But it must be admitted that Christian teachers were slow to provide a reasoned apologetic for these new devotional practices. Again, one has the impression that until the iconoclast crisis, religious art was not a sufficiently controversial issue to generate much comment.

In the sixth century, the Platonising symbolic theology of the Ps. Dionysius provided thought-forms for a more profound 'anagogical' account for the func-

tion of icons¹⁵: thus we have Hypatius' grudging concession¹⁶ that art may assist the spiritual ascent of the simple; and dedicatory epigrams on icons, asserting that such art is able to 'direct the mind to a higher contemplation, and... convey to its object (the holy person depicted) the prayer of the mind'¹⁷. But such passages are scattered fragments, not followed up, despite the astonishing burgeoning of the icon-cult in the age after Justinian.

The immediate background to the contribution of Damascene is the response to Jewish polemic of the seventh century, which fixed on the icon-cult as evidence of Christian idolatry¹⁸. For the most part (given the identity of the adversaries), writers such as Leontius of Neapolis and Anastasius of Sinai limit themselves to mining the text of the Old Testament for instance in which holy persons or things are venerated by the Saints of Old Dispensation: 'Just as Jacob embraced... the bloody coat of Joseph, so all Christians hold and physically embrace the icon of Christ.'¹⁹ From this is deduced the important principle that the sacred symbol (e.g. the cross) or image is not itself worshipped but through it, love and reverence are conveyed to the one associated with it or depicted in it. Leontius adds one further insight, concerning the priestly role of man in articulating through art and architecture, as well as through nature, the inarticulate praise of the whole Creation. The visible material world, both divine and human artefacts, are here as sacraments of God's presence and media of human response²⁰. In this passage we come closest to Damascene's view (developed from the ideas of ἀναγωγή in Ps. Dionysius) that rightly perceived, the created order offers a great

15. Vid. especially, his tracts *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and *On the Divine Names*.

16. *Miscellaneous Enquiries*, ed. Diekamp, O.C.A. CXVII, 1938, pp. 127-129.

17. Agathius, *Greek Anthology*, I, 34; of Nilus Scholasticus, *Palatine Anthology*, 33; the image of St. Michael 'leads us up to the intelligible memory of heavenly beings'.

18. vid. P. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople*, Oxford 1958, pp. 30-34.

19. Leontius, *Apol. contra Judaeus*, P.G. XCIII, 1599C.

20. vid. N. Gendle, "Leontius of Neapolis: A Seventh Century Defender of Holy Images" (*Cistercian Studies*, in press). It is unfortunate that neither John of Damascus nor (as far as I know) any iconodule theologian carried further Leontius' extremely suggestive idea of the priestly role of the Christian as artist creating in the image of the Creator. Perhaps here the Byzantine believer, with his highly developed aesthetic sense, might have found a theological evaluation not only of the icon but of artistic creativity in general.

5. *Hom. in mart. Theod.*, P.G. LXVI, 739D.

6. *Ep. IV. 61*, P.G. LXXIX, 577ff.

7. *Poems XXVII*, 542f; *Ep. XXXII. 2*.

8. *Ep. ad Serenum*, Pl. LXXVII, 91 (painting is 'like scripture', the Bible of the illiterate).

9. Vid. N. Gendle, 'Art as Education in the Early Church', *Oxford Art Journal*, III, 1979, pp. 3-8.

10. *Poems*, P.G. XXXVII. 737-8.

11. *Hom. in S. Meletium*, P.G. L., 576.

12. *In imag. hom.*, I, P.G. XCIV, 1277C.

13. N. Gendle, "The Role of the Byzantine Saint in the Development of the Icon Cult", in: *The Byzantine Saint, Studies Supplement to Sobornost V*, London 1981, pp. 181-96.

14. E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images before Iconoclasm", *DOP VII*, 1954, pp. 83-151.

repository of symbols, capable of elevating the mind to God.

It was the attack on the holy images by the imperial government itself in the 720's that finally forced the Church to produce a sustained theological defence of Christian art²¹. Faced with Leo III's charge of idolatry, the iconodule theologians of the first phase of the Crisis (John of Damascus, Germanos of Constantinople) evolved clear distinctions between worship and veneration and developed the account of the icon as a vehicle of knowledge, grace and power. In the second phase of the conflict, attention was diverted from the crucial issue of the sacramentality of religious art by the famous *dilemma* of Constantine V; this had the effect of channelling most of the debate into the well-worn tracks of christological controversy concerning the relation of the two natures in Christ, and whether to depict the Saviour in art does not involve either confusing or dividing the natures²². The writings of S.S. Theodore Studites and Nicephoros indeed yield new scholastic precisions about the hypostatic union and circumscription²³; but they add little substantially new to the defence of St. John of Damascus, based on the twin foundations of creation and incarnation. It is this theology, I would argue, that addresses the nub of the issue, and most convincingly vindicates the essential legitimacy of the believer's approach to the holy through the mediation of material images of Christ and the saints.

The teaching of St. John of Damascus is contained principally in his three *Orationes against those who attack the Holy Images*²⁴. Underlying the incarnational defence of icons which lies at the heart of his apology, is a strong sense that image-making is a basic mode of divine creativity and self-revelation. God the Father eternally begets the Son, who is 'the first natural and precisely similar "image of the invisible God"²⁵, for he

reveals the Father in his own person²⁶. Then God created man according to his own image and likeness, to reflect and share the divine life not by nature but by imitation²⁷. So God himself, the primordial artist, was the 'first to make an image, and presented images to our sight, for "God created man in his own image"²⁸, and Abraham, Moses, and all the prophets saw images of God, but not the essence of God²⁹.

In referring to the images seen by the prophets, John has in mind the theophanies of the Old Testament, in which the divine manifestations are described in anthropomorphic terms. Thus 'Moses saw as it were the back of a man, and Isaiah saw God as a man sitting upon a throne³⁰. God projected himself under the figure of a man because man is the crown of his creative work, and the most appropriate image or figure under which he may communicate with men — an image which prefigured the appearance of his Son in the flesh.

Moreover, the saints of the Old Dispensation rightly responded by adoration to these self-revelations of God through visionary images, and this too provides scriptural justification for our veneration of holy images: 'Abraham did not see the divine nature, for no man has ever yet seen God, but he saw an image of God (viz. the three angels at Mamre)³¹, and fell down and worshipped³². So, God's work in making his image, man, provides a living icon whereby man can approach his creator and indeed in respecting and honouring each other, we are simply venerating the primordial image made by God himself, and the form assumed for our sake by his Son.

But on a wider level, God in creating the world, brought into being a great repertory of images capable of elevating the mind to himself. John here is developing the thought of Ps. Dionysius, whom he cites widely in his *catena* of patristic testimony concerning images.

21. For an historical and theological account of the Iconoclast Controversy, *vid.*: J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, (New York, 1975), pp. 173-192.

22. Alexander, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-53. argues convincingly (*ib.*, pp. 47-8) that before Constantine V, Christology was not at issue in iconoclast theology: I would add that it is very much a secondary issue at this stage in iconodule theology also.

23. Alexander, *ibid.*, pp. 189ff.

24. P.G. XCIV, ed. B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, Berlin, 1979. Eng. Trans: D. Anderson, *St. John of Damascus, On the Divine Images*, New York, 1980. This, by and large, is the version I have quoted in this article. Damascene summarises his teaching in ch. 16 of his *de Fide Orthodoxa*, IV.

25. Col I. 15.

26. *de imag. hom.* III. 18 (All subsequent references are to this work, unless otherwise specified).

27. III. 20.

28. Gen. I. 27.

29. II. 20.

30. III. 26, citing Ex. XXXIII. 24, and Isa. VI. 1.

31. Gen XVIII. 2. The three angels at Mamre provide the basic O.T. prefiguration of the Trinity, and the subject-matter of the Orthodox icon of the Trinity.

32. III. 26. The distinction might have been made clearer by referring to the divine energies which come down to us and the essence which remains unapproachable. (cf. Basil, *Ep.* CCXXXIV. 1). In discussing revelation, John is always careful to preserve the apophatic dimension.

As Dionysius explains, we are led to the perception of God by the visible images in creation, and Scripture draws upon terms derived from nature to explain supernatural truth³³. The world around us, created as an expression of divine wisdom, offers to our view a plethora of natural symbols whereby invisible realities may be partly apprehended: 'Visible things are corporeal models which provide a vague understanding of intangible things'³⁴. All this is part of God's accommodation to the limitations of human nature, 'since our inability immediately to direct our thoughts to contemplation of higher things makes it necessary that familiar things be utilised to give suitable form to what is formless, and make visible what cannot be depicted'³⁵. This is why Scripture is replete with concrete, perceptible images: 'using what is common to nature, it brings within our reach that which we long for but are unable to see'³⁶. Hence, for example, the use of the image of the rock (referring to God) in the Psalms brings to mind a sense of the divine steadfastness and irrefragibility³⁷. It is not only within Scripture that Nature performs an analogical function: 'Since the creation of the world, the invisible things of God are clearly seen by means of images'³⁸. Thus, the image of the sun, its light and rays, may form a rough analogue of the true God. Such images in creation, 'though only dim lights, still remind us of God'³⁹.

Indeed, it is useless to try to attempt to begin the ascent to knowledge of God except from the level of sense-perception. We are embodied spirits, not bodiless pure intelligences, and as Gregory Nazianzen warns us, 'the mind which is determined to ignore corporeal things will find itself weakened and frustrated'⁴⁰. 'Since we are fashioned of both soul and body, and our souls are not naked spirits, but covered as it were by a fleshly veil, it is impossible for us to think without using corporeal images. Just as we physically listen to perceptible words to understand spiritual things, so by using bodily sight, we

reach spiritual contemplation'⁴¹. God's self-revelation in the Incarnate Christ (and the Church's sacramental system that stems from this) is but the supreme example of God's providential way since the creation of man to lead him to the invisible and spiritual by way of created, material things. Like images in nature and in Scripture, Christian visual images are eloquent yet necessarily imperfect vehicles for communicating a sense of the invisible and transcendent: "Now the icon is a dark glass, fashioned according to the limitations of our physical nature. Though the mind wear itself out with effort, it can never cast away its bodily nature" (I.5).

Even under the Law, the same God who in the Decalogue forbade the making of graven images, ordered Moses to construct the tabernacle as 'a shadow and copy of the heavenly sanctuary'⁴², indeed as 'an image of the whole creation'⁴³. The tent itself, the altar and all the furnishings were human artefacts, and included the carved cherubim, made specifically at the divine command, and 'venerated by all Israel'⁴⁴. Here we have a clear Old Testament case of not only material things, but works of human art, used by God's permission for worship and instruction. Christian icons fulfil exactly the same function as these Jewish cult-objects: they remind us of the mighty acts of God in the past, and of the exploits of the heroes of the faith, and stir us up to gratitude, devotion and moral and spiritual effort'. 'You see that the law and everything it commanded and all our own practices are meant to sanctify the work of our hands, leading us through matter to the invisible God'⁴⁵. The creation of a commemorative sacred image sanctifies both the maker and the matter from which it is made, enduing the material image with sacramental significance.

Thus we see that even before the Incarnation, God through his visible creation, through the making of man

33. Ps. Dionysius, *de div. nom.* I and *de eccles. hier.* I, cited by John at the start of his first *Catena* (end of *Or.* I).

34. I. 11 (cf. III. 21).f

35. *loc. cit.*

36. *loc. cit.*

37. Other scriptural images may be called typological, rather than anagogical: e.g. the Ark of the Covenant or the Burning Bush as emblems of the Mother of God, or the Brazen Serpent of the Cross. (cf. I, 12).

38. I. 11 (citing Rom I, 20).

39. *loc. cit.*

40. *Theol. Or.* 2.

41. I, 12 (cf. III, 17) John in fact places verbal and visual symbols absolutely on a par as media of revelation: if Scripture constantly uses concrete images to adumbrate divine truth, then the icon translates the events and images of Scripture into visual form. The Icon is the Gospel made visible (*vid.* II. 10, III.12, 18, 23).

42. II.22 (citing Ex. XXV.40 and Heb. VIII.4-9). cf. I.13, 15, 17, II.14, III. 11 (the Tabernacle and its artefacts). The figural decorations Bezaleel was ordered to make for the Temple provide another telling O.T. precedent for Christian images and their veneration (e.g. I,16, 20).

43. *de Fid Orth.*, IV, 16.

44. I. 22. But (as we have seen) not *all* figural art was banned in the Israelite place of prayer, though (as John admits) Jewish religious art was unknown.

45. II. 23.

as a body/soul unity in his image, by inspiring concrete images drawn from nature in Scripture, and by permitting the man-made cult-furnishings of the Jewish Tabernacle and Temple, provided a wealth of material images by and through which man might attain to knowledge of his Creator. All these images in different ways illustrate the spiritual potentiality of matter, finally elevated to the highest degree by the appearance of God himself in the flesh.

Before this point, it was of course forbidden to make an image of God — not only to inhibit the idolatrous tendencies of the Jews⁴⁶, but because in the very nature of things, the transcendent Godhead exceeds all definition: 'It is impossible to make an icon of God the incorporeal, the invisible, the immaterial and uncircumscribed, who has no form and is beyond comprehension: for how can that which is not seen be depicted? But while no-one has ever seen God, yet the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made this unseen God manifest...'⁴⁷ The last sentence of this citation brings us at once to the heart of the matter; the coming of God the Word in the flesh has made possible and legitimate what before was unthinkable, since God himself has deigned to take upon himself human form and become an object of sense-perception. Looking at the incarnate Christ, we behold the human face of God.

That body assumed by Christ is not merely a temporary expedient of revelation, but is permanently united with his Godhead; and it is this new and saving union of divinity and humanity in Christ which the icon commemorates and celebrates. It forcibly reminds us that "in the Incarnation, a decisive and eternal change took place in the relationship between God and material creation"⁴⁸. The Incarnation restored not only the defaced image of God in fallen man, but also matter itself, created good by God at the beginning, but then caught up in the Fall and rendered opaque to the divine energies. Through the deified material body of the Saviour, the whole cosmos has been re-created and redeemed. As John remarks in the first Oration: 'In former times, God, being without form or body, could in no way be represented. But today, since God has appeared in the flesh and lived amongst men, I can represent what is visible in God. I do not worship matter, but I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who has been pleased to dwell in matter and

through matter has achieved my salvation. Never will I cease to honour the matter which brought about my salvation'⁴⁹.

The Incarnation, then, is the basic divine validation of the icon, superseding the Mosaic veto. 'Israel of old did not see God, but we "with unveiled faces behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord"⁵⁰. And so with confidence I make an icon of the invisible God, not, in so far as he is invisible, but in so far as he became visible for our sakes by partaking in flesh and blood. I do not make an icon of the invisible Godhead, but I make an icon of the visible flesh of God'⁵¹.

Of course, the veneration of icons is not without danger, if improperly understood; and this is why it is necessary first, to harmonise iconology with Christology, and secondly, to distinguish carefully between worship and veneration⁵². We may sum up the orthodox view of the icon of Christ by saying that *through* the image, we worship the One depicted, not the icon itself, and that what is depicted is not the divinity of Christ ('not as invisible') but the outward form of his humanity ('as become visible for our sake'⁵³). Matter is, of course, honourable in itself, all the more so as a result of the Incarnation. Nonetheless, John emphasises that 'when we venerate icons, we do not offer veneration to matter, but by means of the icon, we venerate the person depicted. For, as St. Basil says, "the honour given to the image passes to the prototype"⁵⁴.

The icon is to be venerated only because of its inner relationship of similarity to what it depicts. When the likeness is impaired by physical damage, then the artwork ceases to be a sacred icon and must be discarded: 'Obviously, I do not worship matter; for if it should happen that a cross, which has been fashioned from matter, should be ruined, I could consign it to the flames, and the same with damaged icons'⁵⁵⁻⁵⁷. The icon, then, is not an idol, but a quasi-sacramental sign and a point of encounter with the holy.

We ourselves cannot share the Apostles' experience

49. I. 16.

50. *loc. cit.*, quoting II Cor. III. 18.

51. I.4. This chapter is, in fact, John's personal confession of faith, beginning with the Trinity, then Christology, then the orthodox theology of the icon.

52. For this distinction, *vid.* I.8, 14, III. 27-40.

53. *loc. cit.*

54. III. 41, citing Basil, *de Spiritu Sancto*, 18.

55. II. 19.

56. II. 5.

57. *cf.*, II. 19 (relics of the Passion, the Tomb).

46. I. 7.

47. II. 8 (citing Jn. I. 18).

48. Anderson, *op. cit.* p. 8.

of direct physical contact with the Incarnate Lord, but in and through the icon we come into intimate personal contact with 'God incarnate, seen on this earth in the flesh — for we yearn to see how he looked'⁵⁸. The icon (like the relic⁵⁹) answers to a deeply seated human need for a palpable and sensible point of contact with the transcendent. Christ is now risen and ascended, but through the icon we can still encounter him as it were face to face, and worship him whom we can no longer directly see with our bodily eyes: "Shall I not make an image of him who was seen in nature of flesh for me? Shall I not worship and honour him through honouring and venerating his image?" This may (by extension) apply legitimately as much to icons of the glorified saints as to those of Christ himself⁶⁰.

Finally, let us take up again the importance of John's theology of the icon for our understanding of the dignity and potentiality of the material creation. As we have seen, even before the Incarnation, and despite the Fall, matter has been a necessary and providential vehicle for embodied man to achieve a partial apprehension of God and divine things. Indeed, one of the most telling charges that John is able to bring against the iconoclasts is that they are crypto-Manichaeans: 'You despise matter, and call it contemptible. So did the Manichaeans, but Scripture proclaims it good, for it says, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good". Therefore, I declare that matter is the creation of God, and a good thing'⁶¹. So the doctrine of Creation provides the first validation for our respect for the material world, and the Christian sense of it as a sacrament of the divine presence. The goodness of the created world is also the ultimate basis for our understanding of the material image as a channel of spiritual grace.

But the Incarnation (the paradigm *par excellence* of matter as a vehicle of spirit) has raised matter to an entirely new level of significance and dignity. 'Behold the glorification of matter, which you (iconoclasts) despise -- "And the Word was made flesh"-- so I salute matter, approach it with reverence, and I venerate that through which my salvation has come. I honour it, not as God, but because it is full of grace and strength'⁶². Matter can

now become a diaphanous and luminous medium of grace, above all through the church's sacramental signs⁶³, but also in a special way, through man-made images. Icons are part of a whole nexus of *res sacra* within the Church, which include the sacred relics of Christ and his saints, places associated with their lives, the cross, the gospel-book, church buildings, altars and liturgical vessels, all of which are material things set apart by God's will for spiritual purposes, as media of grace⁶⁴. All, because of association or divine consecration, are by tradition objects of veneration within the church. If the iconoclast will bow before the cross and kiss the Gospel-book, why will he not accord the same love and respect to the icon, which (in a different mode) communicates exactly the same saving message⁶⁵.

It is to be hoped that this paper has sufficiently shown the fundamental importance of the doctrines of Creation and the Incarnation for the Icon-theology of St. John of Damascus. His iconology is profoundly christocentric; though never (as so often in the next generation) narrowly christological. Christ, the perfect and eternal image of the invisible God, who created man as living image of his maker, takes on human form to restore the divine image in us. By creating images of Christ, man uses his own God-given creative power to commemorate the permanent and concrete salvific actuality of the Incarnation, and to provide a point of meeting with the Risen Lord, through which the presence of the One depicted may be mediated⁶⁶.

We have also seen that he teaches a consistently 'high' sacramental view of matter: created by God as 'very good' in the beginning, a vehicle of revelation at all times, renewed and sanctified in the Incarnation, it continues and extends the incarnational principle in the life of the church as the matter of the sacraments, relics and (in particular) holy images. The icon, in short, celebrates at once the redemption of matter and the restoration of the image of God in man through the Incarnation.

63. I. 16 (cf., III. 12)

64. *loc. cit.*

65. The Cross was the only visual religious symbol the iconoclasts venerated. On the analogy between icon and Gospel, *vid:* II. 10, III. 12, 18, 23, and note 41 above. In II. 10, it is clear that by John's time, the same warm physical devotion was extended by believers to both icon and Gospel ("we embrace them... kiss them and bow before them"). We are sanctified as much by *seeing* Christ's form and saving acts in icons as by *hearing* about them from Scripture (III. 12).

66. So too with commemorative images of the saints.

58. III. 26.

59. *vid:* N. Gendle, 'The Byzantine Saint' (:note 13 above), p. 183. John deals with the icons of the saints at: I. 19-22, III. 26.

60. III. 26.

61. II. 13, citing Gen. II. 31.

62. II. 14 (cf., I. 16).

This doctrine, it seems to me, constitutes the essence of orthodox icon-theology. But that is not to claim that it is comprehensive or incapable of further development. In particular, I would suggest, the relationship between icons and sacraments needs to be more precisely explored, and the nature of art and human creativity as such requires further theological explication: not least, development of Leontius' remarks about the priestly role of the artist as maker, creating in the image of God the Creator. As Gervase Matthews reminds us, "through man alone, the material becomes articulate in praise of God"⁶⁷.

Then again, the nature of Christian iconography as the art of transfiguration is a rich field for development: John notes that it is the divinised and transfigured human nature of Christ which is shared by the saints⁶⁸, but does not draw out the implications of this for sacred

art. The icon of the saint is precisely the image of a *holy* man, and so an icon can never be merely naturalistic, but is an attempt to convey the radiant faces of those who, while still on earth, anticipated the resurrection of the body⁶⁹. Thus the icon has also an eschatological dimension.

In fact, it has had to wait till our own century for these further aspects of the art and cult of the icon to be explored by theologians and Byzantinists. But within the history of image-theory in the Eastern Church, it is the achievement of St. John Damascene to have responded to the challenge of iconoclasm by evolving the first sustained theological account of Christian art. In this teaching, we see the integration of the icon within its primary dogmatic matrix, the re-creation of man and the cosmos in Christ.

67. *Byzantine Aesthetics* (London, 1963) pp. 23-4.

68. I.4. ('The flesh assumed by him is made divine'), and I. 19 (the saints divinised by grace).

69. *vid.* Gendle, 'The Byzantine Saint', pp. 185-6.