

The Gospel Through Beauty:

The beauty of icons and liturgical art as a key to secular Europe¹

by Aidan Hart

My subject this afternoon is liturgical beauty and the role it can play in drawing people closer to Christ, both in worship and in mission. My own speciality is the creation of visual liturgical art - icons, frescoes, mosaic and carvings - but the principles I discuss in relation to these apply also to church architecture and music.

I would like to discuss three areas:

1. How and why the beauty of good liturgical art, although created for church worship, has historically proven to be a powerful means of communicating the Good News to the world.
2. Outline some principles of liturgical art as understood by the Orthodox Church. We must admit that the liturgical art of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox has gone in somewhat different directions on the last six hundred years or so, and so we need to look at the reasons behind this and learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses.
3. Discuss some of the ways in which future liturgical art can be improved.

1. Their voice has gone out into all the world

The language of the heart

As a full-time iconographer of the Orthodox Church for over thirty years I have had ample opportunity to observe the powerful effect that icons can have on people, non-Christians as well as believers. They somehow bypass so many of the misconceptions and caricatures that people harbour about Christ and life in the Church. These holy images challenge and inspire the heart directly. They present us with faces rather than concepts or systems.

Three years ago I painted a 9.5 metre (31 foot) high fresco of the Transfiguration for the east wall of a Catholic church in Leeds where before there had been a white wall with a small plain cross. A month after completing the work I returned to visit the parish and was told by some members how it had not only transformed their worship but had begun to draw many non-Christians to visit and attend services.

¹ A talk at the conference 'Eastern Christian Thought and Practice for 21st Century Europe', Cardiff, 26-28 November, 2014, organised by the Theotokos Institute for Catholic Studies.

Opens doors

I have also noticed that being an icon painter has opened doors to speak in quite a natural way about spiritual things in otherwise secular institutions. Through the common ground of art I receive invitations from television, radio, art galleries, art clubs, ecology groups, even the British Library. It is impossible to explain why icons are painted and used the way they are without speaking about union with God, about the cross and resurrection, about transfiguration, about Paradise lost and found.

There are also many points of contact with the icon. The icon tradition has much to say not just about art and theology, but also about ecology and the nature of the human person. Just last week I was filmed for an upcoming documentary for BBC television on the history of the portrait. The same producer had filmed me a few years before for a programme on the history of colour.

The important point to make here is that the meeting ground for these invitations has been the material stuff of icons - not words or ideas, but material objects fashioned to reflect divine realities. As Saint Paul wrote, "it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual" (1 Corinthians 15:46). And St John of Damascus:

Just as we physically listen to perceptible words in order to understand spiritual things, so also by using bodily sight we reach spiritual contemplation. ("On Divine Images", 3. 12)

What led to these speaking invitations was that people recognized the special quality of icons and wanted to know what lies behind them. Even those people who do not find icons attractive recognize that they denote a different vision of the world and this provokes their curiosity.

From art to faces

Another characteristic of icons that makes it possible to speak openly about Christianity within secular institutions is that they are not just beautiful objects but that they lead us to faces, to the face of Christ, the faces of saints and angels. Icons keep the faith personal. Icons exist precisely to lead us into a living relationship with those depicted.

The same applies to all the other liturgical arts. They exist not primarily to give aesthetic pleasure but are a gift of love from man to God and a revelation of God to man. Liturgical art is adornment, a garment, but it is a garment worn by the Church, the Body of Christ. When we look at the beauty of this raiment we find that we are looking at Christ.

The presence of icons and especially wall paintings in a church helps to communicate Christianity as a community and relationship and not a mere moral system or philosophy. The mystery of the human person is too great to be contained in or content with systems. I recall from my two year sojourn at Iviron monastery on Mount Athos that Father Vasileios, the then abbot, used to say that he was Orthodox because Orthodoxy took him beyond Orthodoxy. He asserted that the human soul cannot be satisfied by any system or -oxy or ideology but only with the Spirit of God. Life in Christ affirms both the knowability and the unknowability of personhood, of both love and awe, of both the brightness of the transfigured Christ and the dark cloud of unknowing.

Art of transfiguration

Another characteristic of good liturgical art is that it depicts the world transfigured, shows the world as a bush burning with the grace of God. As mentioned above, we can view liturgical art as a garment for the Body of Christ. But this Christ is transfigured. The Gospels tell us that not only was Christ's face transfigured but also His garments. Inanimate matter partook of His divine grace and uncreated light. And this garment is a type of the whole cosmos which, as this Greek word implies, is destined to be a transfigured adornment of the Church, a garment for the bride of Christ.

Liturgical art, especially its visual art, needs to reflect, evoke and participate in this transfigured cosmos. It should invite us to deepen our vision so that we see the world not just with our physical eyes but also with the eye of the heart, what the Greek Fathers call the *nous* and the Latin Fathers the *intellectus*.

Nostalgia and the image of God

Without necessarily knowing why, so many people are drawn to the mysterious beauty of icons. I think this is because we are made in God's image and are created for His light. We are Sonflowers, made to turn always towards the Son.

Bees are attracted to flowers first by their colour and their fragrance, that is, by their beauty. They then draw near and find the nectar that they need to live. We humans are like bees, only we are created with a 'genetic' longing for the nectar of Christ, and it is beauty which so often first draws us close to Him. It is the nectar of Christ that we need to live, and the pollen of the Holy Spirit that creation needs to flourish, but it is beauty which first beckons us to draw near the Holy Trinity.

In a world that increasingly denies the existence of God, how can we communicate the Gospel? What is the key to people's hearts? I think the first stage is to nurture nostalgia, to give people a scent of paradise. People change if they find something better than what they have. I believe that the divine beauty of good liturgical art is one of the most powerful ways of recalling this deep memory of paradise, which is surely our homeland, now lost?

If we believe that everyone is made in the image of God then it is natural for them to love Him and unnatural to not do so. We don't therefore need to convince people of the truth - nor can we - for it is already imprinted on their soul. What we can do is create an atmosphere in which beauty resonates and amplifies that small voice within.

The key is to find the right frequency, which differs from culture to culture, person to person. Once this frequency is hit, it can bypass all sorts of misconceptions. Deep calls to deep.

2. Some principles of liturgical art

We come now to a discussion of the timeless principles of liturgical art as understood by the Orthodox Church's icon tradition. This is a big subject, so here I will mention just a few principles that are pertinent to our topic of beauty and mission.

What is the Good News?

Any liturgical art surely aims to reflect a redeemed world, a state of salvation within the Church. What is this state as understood by the icon tradition? If beauty is one means of communicating the Good News, what is this Good News?

If people are not listening to the Gospel, perhaps it is because we as Christians are unclear what this Gospel is. Perhaps we are communicating both in our liturgical art and in our mission the wrong news, news that doesn't inspire. I recall talking to a scholar at Oxford whose doctoral thesis was on religious education. She said something which has stuck with me, that unless a person believes they are created by a loving God, then such terms as sin and salvation are meaningless. What are we saved to if we don't believe in a paradise? If Christ saves us from Hell, then what is the heaven He is saving us to?

I think that there are three chief characteristics of the Good News and of its relationship with beauty:

- We are created to love God and to be deified, not merely to be followers or imitators of Christ but to be partakers of His divine nature. So to be fully human is not to be merely human, but to be gods by grace, to be deified through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Christ's ascension was not an afterthought but the raising of our human nature in Him to sit at the right hand of the Father. And Pentecost is the sending of the Holy Spirit to dwell forever within each believer personally and in the Body of Christ communally to make this ascension a personal reality.
- God is Trinity, and so to be in God's image and likeness is to be united to everything in reflection of this communal, relational nature of God. This union is not just between each person and God and our fellow humans, but with all creation. Salvation consists of these three inseparable unions: divine, human and "ecological". Salvation is not salvation from matter, but the salvation of matter in and through us as prophets, priests and kings of creation in Christ.
- This union in love with all things is why beauty is so important: liturgical beauty is a revelation and fruit of the theosis of the human person and the transfiguration of the cosmos. It is a foretaste of the New Jerusalem. An icon is a microcosm of the harmony of the New Jerusalem. True beauty therefore is not primarily aesthetic but theological, ontological and eschatological. Artistic and liturgical beauty is the natural fragrance of a union of all creation with the Creator and a foretaste of the Kingdom to come. It is the fragrance of the bride of Christ that goes before her as she draws near to earth when she will "come down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2).

Nostalgia

The first stage in any person's journey closer to God is to want to begin. If people do not want God it is often, if not usually, because the devil and the world have successfully distorted their image of Him, made Him either repulsive and even non-existent. Why begin a journey if there is only a

grumpy and mean God at the end of it? The demons want us to believe that freedom consists in isolated independence - independence from other people, from our environment, from God. To this end the demons try to convince us that God has ulterior motives, that life with Him will constrict us, squeeze us, impoverish us. God said to Adam and Eve that, apart from one tree, they had free reign of the garden of Eden: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." (Genesis 2:15,16). But the serpent twists this to make God seem mean:" Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" (3:1)

So liturgical art's first mission is to woo people, grant them a scent of paradise, help them see that life with God is beautiful, expansive, freeing. To experience this divine beauty and liberation certainly requires struggle, repentance and suffering, even death. But people will not embark on this journey bearing their cross unless they have first had a taste of what is at the end. Once people have had a scent of this divine beauty their suffering is bearable and acceptable.

It was in order to give them a glimpse of what His coming suffering was for that Christ showed Himself transfigured to Peter, James and John, and raised Lazarus from the dead just a few days before His passion. These miracles were a sign of the norm, evidence of man's coming restoration to the Kingdom of God.

So the first job of beauty is to kindle nostalgia, to call to remembrance the paradise we have lost. Before the prodigal son set out on the road back to his father he first had to come to himself and remember what it was like when he lived in the paradise of his father's estate.

Call to action and repentance

Having stimulated nostalgia, the next task of liturgical art is to incite and direct movement back towards that lost homeland. The way an icon is painted and used aims to stir us to this action. Liturgical art should not therefore be content with giving mere aesthetic pleasure but must always have an ascetic element. Struggle is required to possess love, joy and peace as a permanent state.

This is why icons have a touch of sadness, the bright sadness of repentance, of knowing one has hurt others, that one has wounded one's own soul. Getting the right balance of expressed joy and sorrow is a major challenge for an icon painter. Too much joy can be sentimental, and too much sadness morose.

A second consequence of this instructive role of icons is that they are integrated with the spoken and written words of worship, with the Church's hymnography. The design of a festal icon must relate to the liturgical texts of that feast. The icon interprets the hymns and the hymns the icon. The image is general, while words are specific. The icon is an atlas, giving the whole picture, while hymnography and patristic writings are more detailed ordinance survey maps.

Each icon is used in conjunction with its liturgical celebration, being placed on an icon stand to be venerated and prayed in front of during that feast or saint's celebration.

The Orthodox church applies the same principle to its church music, which probably explains why its worship does not have purely instrumental music. Music is always used to carry words. Similarly church architecture, which should be designed to fit like a garment the liturgical action occurring inside. One starts with the liturgy and then designs an architectural setting that fits and express that liturgy. A given church design might be an interesting piece of architecture, but if it does not fit the liturgy practically and symbolically then it has failed as a temple. I recall Metropolitan Kallistos saying that Frank Lloyd Wright's Orthodox church of the Annunciation in Wisconsin was so unfitting for the celebration of the liturgy that he found it a failure as a temple. It felt more a cinema than a church.

The three stages of the spiritual life and the icon

Both western and eastern Christianity affirm three stages in the spiritual life, and liturgical art has a role to play in each of these. In the West these are generally called purification, illumination and union, and in the East, practical theology, natural theology and mystical theology.

As a person is purified by repentance and the action of grace their spiritual eyes are opened. Through their *nous* or eye of the heart they begin to see all people and creation in Christ. Each person and thing is created and sustained by the word of God, and it is this divine word within each thing and person that they begin to perceive, from rock to human person. The purified heart begins to see all creation as a bush burning without being consumed, begins to hear the logos within each individual thing.

Prepared by this partial vision of God hidden within the created world, the seeker is drawn toward union with God, mystical theology. Having seen the 'back parts of God' the follower, like another Moses, is ready to see God face to face and be united to His light.

How do icons express these three stages?

We have already discussed how icons have an ascetic element and show the marks of struggle against disordered passions. This relates to the first stage of purification.

Icons use various stylistic abstractions to suggest the second stage of *physiki theologia* or illumination. Hills and trees might bend to emphasise the inner meaning of the sacred event; the folds of garments, though following elementary laws of drapery, seem to perform a sacred dance; trees and furniture are often embellished with gold calligraphic lines called *assist*, as though afire with light; light comes from within everything rather than bounce off the surface. Buildings are shown viewed from numerous vantage points at once, and lines of perspective converge not in a fictitious distance but in the viewer, for the icon shows a world viewed through God's eyes and not our limited earthly vantage.

Exposed over years to this strange vision of the world, the faithful viewer begins to see the world as it is in God rather than as it appears to the limited human brain and physical eyes.

The third and final stage of union is inexpressible, to be known and not discussed. But it is hinted at and implicit in the very existence of Christian icons. The fact that icons are all to do with faces, with relationships with persons, is central to union. Secondly, the whole tradition of icons is based on the incarnation, the fact that God has united Himself to our human nature

so that we might be united to God. We can only make images of God because He has become visible, become flesh. But of course we have icons of saints as well as of the incarnate God. These saints are in this state of union, *mystiki theologia*, and are therefore depicted with haloes. They are radiant with the Holy Spirit with whom they are united.

Talking of haloes and light, it is interesting to trace how these changed in western European art as its vision of the ideal man changed. During the Italian Renaissance to all intents and purposes the ideal man was no longer the person in union with God but the Uomo Universale, the Universal Man "who can do all things if he will", to use the words of its great exponent, Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72). Although Alberti was a priest and for most of his professional life was employed by the church, "there is almost nothing in his subsequent career to remind one of the fact that Alberti was a churchman"².

As a result of this humanism radiant haloes in art were changed to superimposed rings, and then soon disappeared altogether. And light as symbolic of the Holy Spirit was replaced with physical light from a single external source, and used primarily to model physical form with chiaroscuro.

Art was also no longer so concerned with depicting people in divine time and space but in physical three dimensional space. Consequently the many forms of perspective hitherto used were replaced with single view mathematical perspective system. People become engulfed in landscapes and architecture. As admirable as many of the Renaissance paintings and sculpture are as art, they denote a radical change in what the ideal man is and how we view the world. Art is an icon of its creator's zeitgeist, which is why the Church must be so careful about what styles it embraces when producing its liturgical art.

The icon as door

The word icon means image, and image immediately suggests its prototype, its subject. The whole purpose of a Christian icon is to lead the viewer to the person depicted, to be a door. Its purpose is to become redundant. It exists not to replace its subject, to be a naturalistic rendition *as though* its subject were present. In Christ they are present and need no artistic representative. There is only one Church, and in this Church those on earth and those in heaven are together in the communion of saints.

This is one reason why the first icon that a fully trained iconographer paints is traditionally the transfiguration. This event affirms the incarnation of God and the subsequent transfiguration of man, but also affirms the communion of the saints, for Peter, James and John on earth are present with Elijah and Moses from heaven.

This mediatory role of the icon explains why they tend to be flattened and why the Orthodox Church tends to use relief rather than fully modelled works. This flatness serves various purposes. It reminds us that the image is precisely an image, an imperfect depiction of the subject which is the ultimate reality. A flat image means that one can only face it; it has no back. In the rare situations where fully rounded sculpture has been used it was set into

² Joan Kelly-Gadol in the entry for *Leon Battista Alberti in the Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2014.

niches or against a wall for this very reason. Thirdly, but not least, flatness gives great freedom to arrange the elements theologically and not merely according to place in physical space. In many Nativity icons, for example, we find the space divided into three bands: the top contains the heavenly realm (the star, the angels), the bottom the earthly (Joseph doubting the virgin birth, and the Christ being washed by the midwives), and the centre the mediatory figures (Mary and Christ). In this middle band we also have a left/right division, with the pagan, educated and rich Magi on the left, and the Jewish, uneducated and poor shepherds on the right.

The Nativity icon also often contains the square, circle and semi-circle. The elements on earth are contained within a square which sits in the bottom two thirds of the frame, while the upper third, which contains the heavenly elements, is a semi-circle with its centre on Christ. We thus have a symbol of a cube surmounted by a dome, which is the basis for domed Byzantine churches. If we complete the semi-circle we also notice that all the elements are loosely contained within this Christ centred circle: although a child, Christ remains the creator and sustainer of the whole universe. As the Orthodox Kontakion or Collect of the feast says,

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One! Angels, with shepherds, glorify Him! The wise men journey with the star! Since for our sake the Eternal God is born as a little child.

Liturgical art as image of heavenly worship

Worship on earth is participation in heavenly worship. Its forms therefore need to reflect and be an icon of that heavenly worship. Although human creativity is clearly involved in composing and performing sacred worship, its general lineaments must reflect heavenly worship.

The lineaments of Old Testament worship were not invented by man's creativity but were revealed by God to Moses. The dimensions of the tent of meeting, its colours and furnishings and the rituals to perform were all images of heavenly realities. Although executed using human creativity, imagination and craft, the design of the tent and its furnishings were sourced not in human imagination but in divine revelation. It couldn't be otherwise of they were to accord with heavenly realities.

It is remarkable how the heavenly worship that the Apostle John describes in the last book of the Bible - The Book of Revelation - corresponds with traditional liturgy and church architecture. Surely it is pertinent that St John had this vision when he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10), that is on Sunday, the day of the Holy Liturgy. He describes things that we see still today in church architecture and furnishings and liturgy:

- The seven golden lamp stands (Rev. 1:12).
- Christ enthroned surrounded by twenty four elders corresponds to the bishop's throne in the centre of the apse surrounded by benches for the priests (4:2-4).
- One often sees depictions in the apse of the four living creatures that John describes (4:6).
- "Day and night the four living creatures never cease to sing, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'" (4:8).

This thrice holy hymn is sung at every Liturgy and is simply us on earth joining in with heaven's creatures in their ceaseless worship.

- "The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who is seated on the throne" (4:10). In the Orthodox tradition we venerate the icon of the Saviour by crossing ourselves and bowing three times, or in Great Lent prostrating right to the ground.
- "Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!'" (5:11,12). In a church filled with frescoes or mosaics one not only hears but also sees this heavenly host of angels and saints. In this way we quickly gain a lively sense that when we begin a service on earth we are in fact simply joining in with the ceaseless worship conducted in heaven.

Cultural incarnation

Having said that liturgical art of a given epoch should be rooted in the timelessness of heavenly worship, I would add that it should also affirm and adapt to its use whatever is true or close to truth in that epoch. There are many examples of this principle in action from the very beginning of Church history. The style of the earliest extant panel icons is clearly based on Romano-Egyptian mummy portraits, and up until the tenth century many Byzantine icons were based on then extant classical or Hellenic manuscript paintings. The basilican church is an adaptation of a Roman civil building. Agia Sophia in Constantinople used vaulting techniques drawn from Mesopotamia, groin vaults from Imperial Rome, while the centralised plan came from Armenia or Rome and the pierced basket-type capitals and carved decoration came from Parthian and Sassanian architecture.

This enculturation is a subtle task. Two excesses need to be avoided:

- A. The concern to be local and contemporary should not eclipse the timeless and eternal quality of liturgical art.
- B. The opposite extreme to be avoided is to limit the tradition to copying great works of the past. Whilst copying masterpieces with understanding is an excellent way to unearth their secrets, copying is not of itself the essence of sacred tradition. The fact that one can date and determine the provenance of icons by their style alone testifies to the variety within the icon tradition.

A brief history of liturgical art

In the light of the above discussion it is clear that what constitutes sublime beauty is a subtle thing. A short overview of artistic trends West and East would be appropriate here.

My opinion is that over the last few centuries Western church art has, by and large, turned from the idea that liturgical art should evoke the world and man in their transfigured state, and has preferred to emphasise a human viewpoint, be it through the lens of rationalism, intense emotion, or a quest for novelty.

From the Orthodox point of view, the Romanesque period was the highest point of Western liturgical art. It seems here that high artistic skill is wed to

noetic vision and aim. The Gothic, though still theocentric compared to the humanist Renaissance that followed, is already introducing greater naturalism. Thereafter, visual liturgical art in western Europe seems to swing between the poles of rationalism and emotional force. The Renaissance is characterised by the rise of rationalism, which was followed 1600 to about 1725 by the emotional intensity of the Baroque and Rococo. Around 1760 the pendulum then begins to swing back and we have the coolness of Neoclassicism. This in turn was countered by nineteenth century Romanticism's emphasis on the emotional intensity evoked by contemplation of nature's sublimity.

The re-introduction of abstraction in the early twentieth century is in fact an attempt to reintroduce the spiritual into art, a sort of spiritual idealism. But after the horrors of World War II idealism falls out of fashion and the quest for novelty and emphasis on flux and change dominates. One could say that, broadly speaking, this remains the dominant trend today.

Following the trend of the art world towards extreme abstraction, post Vatican II liturgical art has tended to favour the minimalism of white walls and relegate visual liturgical art to an optional extra. The iconography of the Orthodox Church for its part has in the last century tended to be reactionary and content itself with merely copying medieval icons. It has therefore lost much of its dynamism and the will to relate to the surrounding culture. While this is an understandable response to the gradual debasement of its iconography over the previous three centuries or so, it is a reaction and as such is not a healthy state to remain in forever.

3. Training future liturgical artists

If liturgical beauty is such a powerful means of mission and integral to worship we clearly need people who are able to create this sacred art. What practical steps can be taken to train such artists?

The first step is for the Church to recognize that liturgical art is a specialist field. One cannot just take a secular trained artist and ask him or her to make something for a church. As we have discussed, it is not just what is depicted that makes a painting or sculpture Christian but how this subject is depicted. If the medium is the message, then so too is the style of art its message. The various Churches must include this renewal of visual liturgical art in their priorities, Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican alike.

The Orthodox Church in the West suffers too much from amateur icons painted by people who have attended a couple of five day courses and then presume to make public work. Too many post Vatican Catholic churches have suffered from the whitewashing or stripping of their walls in the name of modernist minimalism. It is as though matter has been considered a hindrance to the spiritual life rather than a support. Anglican churches for their part have too often been content with asking secular artists to make something on a vaguely Christian theme; instead of the Church entering the world with the Gospel, the world has entered the Church.

Liturgical artists need specialist training. They need to know their theology, their liturgy, their architecture, be familiar with the range of iconographic styles from different epochs and cultures, be skilled draughts people, understand colour harmony, understand geometry and proportion, know their materials and craft - how to prepare gesso, gild, prepare pigments and so on - and

understand anatomy and drapery. To the extent they have mastered all this they then need to be courageous enough to go beyond mere copying, to distinguish between the extremes of fearful copying on the one hand and egotistical self expression on the other, to be humble servants of the truth.

We cannot depend on most contemporary art schools to train people in even the basics of technique, colour harmony and proportion. While our age has somehow preserved belief that there are universal principles of music - even rock music accords with basic and acknowledged principles, so that we know for example if someone is singing out of tune - it seems to think that visual art has no such timeless principles and that people can create things straight out of their heads.

The two main ways of serious training in liturgical art are apprenticeship and learning institutions. Apprenticeship is probably the best way, and I think the most traditional. By it the student learns not just techniques but also the whole ethos and mindset of a master, how a studio operates in all its aspects, financial as well as artistic.

Another advantage of the apprenticeship system is that it is largely self funding. Depending on how quick to learn they are, a good apprentice can be a great help to the master and therefore be remunerated according to their ability and experience in a particular field. My own apprentice for example came to me with advanced skill in computers so I pay him the going rate for that work, while he is paid less for artistic work in which he is, for the meantime, less skilled and therefore slower. I increase his pay as his expertise grows.

Nevertheless, given the high cost of living some sort of supplementary grant from an outside source is a great help for apprenticeships. Though I pay my own assistant for work that he does for me, he spends an unpaid day a week studying for a Diploma in Icon Painting that I teach, and for this time he has received a Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust award for three years.

Centres of learning also have their place. At the bottom of the scale are part-time courses. I have established and teach a part-time Diploma in Icon Painting through the Prince of Wales's School of Traditional Arts. This runs for three years and consists of seven three-day sessions a year, along with about five hours of homework a week. This has the advantage that working people can enrol, and that it is funded entirely by student fees. But this by itself does not offer enough tutorial time to train fully professional liturgical artists. For this, full time courses are needed.

Such exist for example in Russia, as at St Tikhon Orthodox Theological institute in Moscow, and in Serbia, at the Academy of the Serbian Orthodox Church for Iconography and Conservation in Belgrade. Both these are I think five year courses. Such a centre of liturgical art training in the West would I think have to serve a number of countries if it were to survive. The question one needs to ask is whether there is sufficient demand for liturgical art to warrant the existence of such a school that might produce, say, ten graduates a year.

This raises the need to educate existing and future priests in the importance of good liturgical art. It is no good training liturgical visual artists if priests do not understand the role of the visual arts in the liturgy and therefore fail to commission anything. At the very least a module on liturgical art should be mandatory for all trainee priests in seminaries. Bishops could also

organize day conferences for existing priests to encourage deeper understanding of the liturgical arts.

Some say that the Church should not expend money on beautifying the church as long as there is poverty in the world. The history of the Church and its saints suggest a both-and approach. St Basil the Great of Caesarea (c. 329-379) for one saw no conflict between effort expended on beautifying the church and on helping the poor. St Gregory of Nazianzus said of St Basil in his funeral oration to the saint:

Basil looked after the support of the poor, the entertainment of strangers, the care of maidens, legislation written and unwritten for the monastic life, arrangements of prayers [i. e. the liturgy], adornment of the sanctuary. (Orations xliii)