The Genesis of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lincoln Sculpture and Liturgical Art in Britain

Aidan Hart[1]

Dean, thank you very much for inviting me back to this splendid cathedral, a place which, after all the meetings I have had here and the two weeks spent polychroming the sculpture of Our Lady of Lincoln, I now think of as a second home.

I speak both as an iconographer of the Orthodox Church for over thirty years and as one with a great affection for the Anglican communion. I was nurtured as an Anglican in my early years as a Christian, and am often commissioned by its churches, cathedrals and individuals. This, and my Anglican icon students all help keep me in lively contact with my fellow Christians.

After describing the genesis and design of the sculpture of Our Lady of Lincoln I want to finish by sharing some thoughts on the future of liturgical visual arts in Britain, what for brevity's sake I shall here refer to as its iconography.

THE GENESIS OF OUR LADY OF LINCOLN

In May 2010 I received an email from Professor Peter Burman asking on behalf of the Reordering Committee if I could submit a short explanation of how I would approach a commission to create a sculpture of the Virgin Mary for Lincoln Cathedral. The request excited me, in large part because I had often wondered if a sculpture in the round could be designed so that it functioned like an icon, that is, as a door to the heavenly realm.

My professional artistic life began as a sculptor, but since becoming a member of the Orthodox Church thirty years ago I had concentrated on relief carving and painting icons and frescoes. So, being of an adventurous disposition I thought it would be a splendid challenge to make a large sculpture in the round if I should win the commission. But it was a long shot, given that a number of eminent sculptors had also been approached.

I was impressed by professionalism of the Reordering Committee who had been commissioned by the Dean and Chapter to take the project forward. Firstly, they had done their homework by organising the previous year a Study Day entitled 'The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Context of Lincoln Cathedral'. Professor Burman had sent me a summary of the talks given that day, along with an explanation of what the Dean and Chapter were after. Together these formed the brief for the commission. Secondly, I was impressed by the fact that Peter was not asking the contestants to spend unpaid days preparing a

[1] A talk to the College of Canons of Lincoln Cathedral on the Feast of St Hugh, Tuesday 17 November, ,

design or maquette. One felt one was working with people who respected the demands on time and pocket of professional artists.

So in May 17th I sent off my artist's statement. It included the words:

> *As an icon carver and painter, I believe that the ultimate role of liturgical art is to be a means of uniting heaven and earth, God and man, eternity and the present. I would therefore aim to make this sculpture of the Virgin Mary of Lincoln a fruit of the incarnation, itself rooted both in place (the chapel, the cathedral, Lincoln, the local materials) and in God.*
>
> *I would chose a style of carving that would reflect a spiritual view of the world, that would be timeless. To aid this I would research the existing Romanesque and Gothic works within the cathedral, as well as drawing on my existing knowledge of other western and eastern iconography.*

A later revised statement of July 2010 said:

> *Although the work is to be a three-dimensional statue, I would approach it as I do my icons, that is, as a liturgical creation whose function is to attract people to prayer, to suggest the numinous, to give insight into the mystery of the Incarnation.*

On 3rd August 2010 I received an email from Peter saying that the ROC would like to have further conversations with myself and the sculptor Martin Jennings, and could I prepare for a fee a small maquette or drawing. I felt honoured to be in the company of a sculptor who was the portraitist on our coins of Her Majesty the Queen herself, whereas I had received commissions merely from The Prince of Wales!

My initial maquette for this interview was of a seated Virgin and Child in an embrace. This first design emphasised the tenderness of the Mother and Child relationship, along the lines of an icon type called Our Lady of Tender Lovingkindness. The scale of the Cathedral demanded that it be a large sculpture, and yet the fairly small footprint of the chapel for which it was intended also required an intimate enough scale to inspire prayer and not overawe. I estimated a height of approximately two metres (six and a half feet) to be about right.

The meeting and maquette seemed to go down well, and on 15 December 2010 Peter sent an email to say that the ROC was recommending me to the Chapter for the commission and could we therefore explore the work further.

After another discussion the committee and I decided to investigate a second design in which the divinity of Christ would be given greater emphasis. We had also noted that in the first maquette the fact that Christ's face was turned toward Mary meant that viewers could not directly engage with Him; viewers might become spectators rather than participants. So in preparation for a meeting on May 24th I prepared a life size drawing and second small maquette. It was this drawing that ended up being the basis of the final work.

Its design was inspired by the icon type 'Our Lady of the Sign', so named after Isaiah's prophecy:

> *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel* [which means God with us]. (Isaiah 7:14*)*

But I shall speak of this design in more detail shortly.

A further two years of meetings followed. The subject was mainly about what material to use. Wood was considered initially, mainly because of its warmth and tactility. But in the end due to the risks involved with shrinkage in such a large work we decided to opt for stone.

The decision then was what type of stone: Should it be marble or limestone? What colour? We wanted a stone dense enough to take detail, but also to be polished. This polishing was important since we wanted the work to be tactile, to be touched. A warm coloured marble was initially considered, but eventually we decided to opt for a limestone, ideally from Britain. But big blocks of consistent and dense limestone are difficult to come by in Britain, especially of a warm hue, so it took a long time to find quarries which came anywhere near the high specifications we had set for ourselves.

I gathered samples from all over Britain, but also from Spain, France and even Jerusalem. Because of its warmth and density we were on the cusp of choosing stone from Jerusalem, but then after discussion with local people there came the resounding request that this sculpture should be an offering from the county of Lincoln. They wanted the sculpture of Our Lady to be incarnate in stone from their land. This rung true to me. There is a beautiful Nativity hymn used in the Orthodox Church which alludes to earth doing its bit towards the incarnation:

> *What shall we offer Thee, O Christ,*
> *Who for our sakes hast appeared on the earth as a man?*
> *Every creature which Thou hast made offers Thee thanks.*
> *The angels offer Thee a song;*
> *The heavens, their star;*
> *The wise men, their gifts;*
> *The shepherds, their wonder;*
> *The earth, its cave;*
> *The wilderness; the manger;*
> *And we offer Thee a virgin mother.*
> *O Pre-eternal God, have mercy on us!*
> (The Royal Hours, Christmas Eve)

So the search resumed and in due course we found stone from a quarry in Great Ponton, near Grantham. This stone had a clear ring when struck, there were blocks large enough - just - and it had an interesting fossil figure.

The quarry owner, Dean Baker, worked hard to find the right block for us. He cut three massive pieces for us to select from, each weighing around five

tonnes. And, for all this labour, Dean insisted on offering our chosen piece as a gift to the cathedral. The best block had a large diagonal fault, but after a lot of measuring I calculated that the figure would just fit in behind this vein.

Since polychromy was the most common treatment of wood carving in medieval times, our initial thoughts about using wood for the sculpture had raised the possibility of colouring the stone carving. After much discussion we decided to go down this path for a number of reasons: to help differentiate the work from the stone background; to add warmth; and to lend the statue greater presence when seen 140 metres away from the west end of the cathedral. I researched stone polychromy and found some splendid Romanesque examples which helped clarify the effect we wanted - more a stain than a paint layer.

On July 19th 2013 the contract was signed. This was followed by a half size clay maquette, which my assistant Martin Earle cast into plaster. To keep costs down and move the process along it was decided to use a robot to remove the bulk of waste stone. Although I am very much a traditionalist who prefers everything hand worked, it seemed only sensible to use a machine to remove the bulk of waste material so that ample time would be left for the hand carving of the main form. So the maquette was scanned, and the stone cut down to 15mm of the final surface by Stoneworld of Oxford.

The roughed out block arrived in my Pontesbury studio September 23rd, 2013. From now on Martin and I carved everything using the traditional tools of hammer and chisel. This hand crafting stage took approximately six months.

There are a myriad decisions that need to be made when carving, and this is one reason why I prefer the tap tap tap of hammer and chisel to the machine gun attack of the pneumatic systems so commonly used today. But beyond that, for me icon carving and painting is to pray with matter rather than words. The creation of an icon is not only a means to an end but is prayer itself, a priestly act in which matter is made even more articulate in praise of its Creator. Inner prayer can keep pace with the tap tap of hand and mallet but not so easily with the automatic weaponry of the pneumatic chisel.

As we neared the end of the carving process I employed some of my icon students to help with the polishing. In all this it was a pleasure to know that a community of people were fashioning this work. Apart from Martin and myself there were the committee members who had invested - and indeed continue to invest - large amounts of time and energy on the project, the donors, quarry workers, freighters, cathedral masons who prepared the plinth, Tom Perkins who later carved the lettering and Sue who gilded the finished work.

The work was to be lowered onto a plinth so I had to devise a massive lifting frame that enabled it to be lifted without recourse to drilling any holes or placing straps under the sculpture. The sculpture was expertly crated by a specialist company from Telford, and on May 13th, 2014 the two tonne crate arrived and masons of the Cathedral Works Department expertly eased it inside and into the chapel. A week later, after a little judicious carving away of some stone to fit the cage into place, Our Lady of Lincoln was finally lowered onto its plinth.

I wanted to do the polychromy in situ so that the colours could be fined tuned to its particular space. While Martin and I were doing this over a two week period it was a joy to experience the day to day life and worship of the cathedral community. Two particular high points were the sound of school children entering like the sound of running water, and the divine choral services.

We naturally wanted to get the polychromy just right, and this was taking longer than expected. But by some miraculous serendipity I stumbled across an expert local gilder, whom I decided to employ to execute the gilding. There are photos of the three of us like working bees around the queen bee.

The four years of preparation and labour came to a climax on May 31st, 2014 at the solemn evensong and the sculpture's dedication by Bishop Christopher Lowson. And so the sculpture's life of ministry began. It gave me huge pleasure to see later in the day a young family come up to the sculpture and stroke it and talk about it. "Her life has begun. May she be loved to bits" was my thought.

THE MEANING OF THE DESIGN

What is the theology behind the sculpture's design?

Incarnation and the Vesica

Those of us who are fans of G.K. Chesterton's writings believe that the greatest things are paradoxes, and the incarnation is the greatest of them. The Pantocrator dwells in a womb, the Creator becomes created, He who is boundless becomes bounded by flesh and yet still sustains the universe by the word of His power. This paradox is indicated by the vesica piscis which suggests both womb and heaven. The choice of this shape rather than the more usual oval or circle was suggested by the cathedral's medieval silver seal, a little detail linking the historical incarnation to this time and place.

Wisdom

One aspect which had been emphasised in the September 2009 conference was Mary as the throne of wisdom, *Sedes Sapientiae,* for Christ is the wisdom of the Father. So in our sculpture we find Christ enthroned on Mary, while Mary herself is seated on a throne to suggest her descent from the wise Solomon. The lion was carved in the back of the throne to suggest the lion of Judah and hence also Solomon.

Enthronement also enabled Christ to be completely surrounded by Mary, which emphasised again the theme of incarnation. It also created a pleasing pyramidal shape, which is stable therefore peaceful, and allowed the height we were after without the danger of becoming top heavy.

Drapery and the transfigured cosmos

In all liturgical art of the past drapery has been a means of expressing the inner spiritual dynamics of an event or person. The Romanesque period has done this par excellence, with magnificent works such as Master Hugo's illuminations in the Bury St Edmunds Gospels and his ivory Cloister's Cross,

the York Minster Virgin, and of course the carvings in this cathedral itself. Drapery needs to lead the eye to the most important things, and give a sense of the subject's inner spiritual dynamics. While sculpted drapery should accord with the essential laws of drapery it should not be so naturalistic that it shows us merely what we can already see with our physical eyes. It should help open the eye of our spirits to see deeper things. Byzantine works tend to transform a curved form into a series of straight lines, whereas the Romanesque artists went the other way and emphasized the curve, in what has come to be called the wet-fold technique. It is this style of drapery I opted to use, to create what I think is a pleasing cascade and eddy of folds.

Perspective

One element of Byzantine and western medieval iconography is the use of various perspective systems to elucidate spiritual truths. One effect of these "supra-rational" systems is to extend us beyond the confines of rationalism into the wider spaces of the spirit, where we see with the eye of the heart, the *nous.* One is somewhat limited in this respect with fully rounded sculpture as compared to painted icons, but nonetheless in Our Lady of Lincoln sculpture I did manage to suggest something of this iconographic perspective by tilting forward the top of the footrest**.** The non-naturalistic style of the sculpture in general also adds to this attempt to awaken us and help us see differently. We did not want to have a sculpture which was a mechanical three dimensional representation of three dimensional bodies.

Traditionally liturgical sculptures such as this would normally be set against a wall so that viewers would be compelled to see the depicted people face to face and less likely to treat the sculpture merely as an object, a work of art. We did not do this in this case, but I think the polychromy helps to define this as a liturgical icon and not a gallery work of art.

The Colours

The earth red undergarment of Mary represents her humanity, and therefore also our humanity which the Lord assumed. Her blue outer garment represents the Lord's divinity which she, and us, have been consequently granted by grace. As Saint Athanasius the Great wrote, "For He was made man that we might be made God" (*On the Incarnation*, section 54).

Some of the early Church Fathers say that when after the fall Adam and Eve saw that they were naked this meant that they had been clothed with God's divine radiance but had lost this raiment of light.

Christ reverses this by putting on our humanity so that we may put on divinity. His transfiguration on Mount Tabor was therefore not only a revelation of His divinity but was also a revelation of the state proper to the human person, that is, to shine with divine light. As a hymn of Vespers in the Orthodox Church puts it:

> *...'I am He who is', was transfigured today upon Mount Tabor before the disciples; and in His own person He showed them the nature of man, arrayed in the original beauty of the Image.*[2]

In Our Lady of Lincoln sculpture Christ is clothed in a golden garment to represent His divinity, in no way diminished during and after His incarnation. He holds in His hand an orb to show that while on earth He remained the Alpha and the Omega, the creator, sustainer and culmination of the cosmos.

Bright sadness

I am aware that some people struggle with expression of sadness in the Our Lady of Lincoln's face. Icons of the Mother of God usually show her with an expression of mingled joy and sadness. It is as though she contemplates the words of Simeon the Elder:

> *Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.* (Luke 2: 34–5)

There exists a single word in patristic Greek for this paradoxical state - *charmolypê.* It is variously translated as bright sadness, bitter joy, joyful mourning, or affliction that leads to joy. True joy is not superficial happiness, but a state that endures through chaos and apparent disaster for it knows that good can rise out of the tomb. It is a state that does not depend on happy circumstances but on an abiding relationship with the living God in the midst of even the worst imaginable circumstances.

We want people to feel that Our Lady of Lincoln identifies with their struggles, to know that she herself has known profound loss and grief when she beheld her Son crucified. But we also want people to know that she has known the joy of His resurrection. Whether or not I succeeded, the aim of the expression on Our Lady of Lincoln's face was to express this joyful sorrow. It is not something most people are used to outside the icon tradition, but this tranquillity without sentiment is a small seed which will, I hope and pray, grow in those who behold her.

THE FUTURE OF LITURGICAL ART IN BRITAIN

I would like now to turn to the broader subject of liturgical art in Britain. Church architecture and music have retained a vigorous life in this island since its conversion to Christianity from the early centuries. But somehow we have come to treat the visual expression of the faith very differently, at best as an optional extra, at worst as outright idolatry. We have such splendid cathedral buildings such as we are in now, and the tradition of church singing has

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[2] The Feast of Transfiguration, Great Vespers, Aposticha. Translation from *The Festal Menaion*, trans. Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (Faber, 1984), p. 476.

enjoyed an unbroken continuity. The written and the preached word - which is we must remember are also a form of imagery since words are but an image of intended meaning - have also of course continued unbroken.

But what of iconography? Until Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell liturgical imagery was an integral part of Christian life in Britain from its beginnings in Roman times. We have one of the earliest mosaics of Christ in the world, on the floor of the church of Hinton St Mary, Dorset. It dates from the early fourth century. At Lullingstone Roman villa in Kent we have the fourth century frescoed walls of the oldest extant house church in the world. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* Bede tells us that when Augustine and his helpers came to Britain to preach the Gospel he bore "the holy cross, and the image of our sovereign Lord and King, Jesus Christ". Bede also tells us that Benedict Biscop brought back numerous panel icons from Rome for his monastic foundations at Jarrow and Monkwearmouth. We know how much the Irish monks held the iconography of their illuminated manuscripts in high esteem. And even poor medieval parish churches had their iconography. The thirteenth century church which my Orthodox parish now owns has simple frescoes dated to around 1380, of St Thomas à Becket's martyrdom.

But as we know, under King Henry VIII, and more so from Oliver Cromwell, the visual liturgical arts suffered greatly in Britain. Statues were destroyed, including those of Our Lady of Lincoln here in the Cathedral. Wall paintings were whitewashed, faces carved out. The polychromy that enriched carved decoration was no longer renewed. We can see traces of this polychromy here throughout Lincoln cathedral. And then the Victorians in their zeal to expose the stone and update churches to the current fashions very often hacked off the plaster altogether. With the plaster went countless medieval wall paintings hidden under the Puritan whitewash. Consequently we have now come to think that bare stone and whitewashed walls are the norm.

But things are beginning to change. The Oxford movement began to address this iconoclasm in its own way, but more contemporaneously, the past thirty or so years has seen greater attempts by the Anglican communion to include more art in its churches and cathedrals. Though the irrational fear of 'popish' imagery still exists in some quarters, it is slowly being replaced by a more theologically informed re-adoption of Christian imagery.

But this raises the question of what sort of imagery we should have in our churches. Do we want just works of art, or do we want liturgical works of art? How do we discern what is appropriate for a church and what is not?

The process undertaken by the Reordering Committee here in this cathedral is I think a model of how such works should be commissioned. The committee made it clear from the beginning that they wanted a sculpture that would inspire prayer and integrate into the larger liturgical choreography of the cathedral. In my opinion, too often church communities have been inflicted by works of art which might be at home in a gallery to "challenge our perceptions" and express the particular world view of the maker, but which contribute little to the life of prayer.

Despite these encouraging moves for more parishes to include liturgical art in their church, by and large visual iconography is still regarded as an optional

extra within the Anglican communion, and sadly also since Vatican II, within Roman Catholicism. Seminaries, if they include anything at all about it, have liturgical art as a tiny optional course. Theology is almost exclusively expressed in terms of words, to the exclusion of images. Iconography is still not regarded as an integral and essential part of worship, but as a matter of personal preference.

Should this remain the case, or should imagery be restored as an essential and natural part of our liturgical life in Britain? I would like to finish with a discussion this question, with particular reference to the event of Christ's transfiguration.

A choice not to have imagery is not a neutral position; it is a definitive statement about our view of the material world, of the human person, of the incarnation, and of mankind's call to deification or union with God. This at least is how the Church saw it during the iconoclastic controversy in the 8th and 9th centuries. St John of Damascus wrote:

> *I shall not cease to venerate matter, for it is through matter that my salvation came to pass. . . Do not insult matter, for it is not without honour; nothing is without honour that God has made.*[3]

I think most Anglicans have now gone beyond the outright iconoclasm of Cromwell, so the question is perhaps not so much whether or not we should have iconography in our churches, but what sort of iconography we are to have. For there are theological implications for *how* a sacred theme is portrayed as well as for *what* is portrayed.

This point is simply illustrated by considering sung liturgical art. Who would say that our Psalms could be sung to any tunes whatsoever and that they would all have the same effect on the hearers' souls? In like manner the style of a work of visual art has as much impact on us as its subject matter. And again, regarding the skill levels required to produce good iconography, would the Precentor allow anyone to sing in his choir, regardless of their being able to sing or not? But Mrs X is a very saintly, sincere person! Maybe, but the congregation would have to listen to her out of tune voice. But alas, too often liturgical art works are accepted or commissioned which are unsuited to liturgical use, either because badly crafted or, more often, because they are more about the individual maker than about divine realities.

On the other extreme, would the Precentor want a highly skilled singer whose ego nevertheless compelled him or her to show off and push their voice to the fore? Why then do we have another standard for the visual arts, where sincerity alone or artistic ability alone often seems to be counted as sufficient reason to place their works in our churches? Bad iconography in a church is

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[3] St John of Damascus, 'On the Divine Images', i, 4. Translation from *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against those who attack the Divine Images,* trans. D. Anderson, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980).

akin to playing a bad sermon or out of tune choir on a loop all day and every day.

This in turn raises the question of the training of liturgical artists. Can we commission any artist to make whatever they want? Or is church art a specialist field, requiring specialist training, theological and liturgical knowledge, and life within the Church?

To answer this we need to know the aims and characteristics of good iconography, and to this subject we shall now turn.

The importance of iconography

1. **Visual liturgical art affirms that matter is good**. The material world is created by God as a means of communion with Him. It is not an obstacle. Those who say that imagery is an impediment to their relationship with God need also close their eyes and not look at the sky, trees, the stars, for all creation is God's iconography. St John of Damascus wrote:

   > *God's body is God because it is joined to His person by a union which shall never pass away. The divine nature remains the same; the flesh created in time is quickened by a reason-endowed soul. Because of this I salute all remaining matter with reverence, because God has filled it with His grace and power. Through it my salvation has come to me.*[4]

2. **Iconography affirms that the all the human senses are good and a means of communion with God**. The scent of incense and beeswax candles; beautiful music and the word of God preached with poetry; the touching of stone and kissing icons; tasting the Holy Eucharist; beholding sacred images - all these are means of communion. Again, St John of Damascus writes:

   > *We use all our senses to produce worthy images of Him, and we sanctify the noblest of the senses, which is that of sight. For just as words edify the ear, so also the image stimulates the eye.*[5]

3. **Images of Christ affirm the reality of the incarnation**. This was the main basis of the Church's defence against the iconoclasm of the 7th to 8th centuries. The Second Council of Nicaea (787 A.D.), or the Seventh Ecumenical Council as it also called, stated that icons are:

   > *a tradition useful in many respects, but especially in this, that the incarnation of the Word of God is shown forth as real and not*

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[4] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images,* 1.16, page 23.

[5] *On Divine Images,* 1.17, page 25.

> *merely fantastic, for these have mutual indications and without doubt have also mutual significations.*[6]

And St John of Damascus:

> *In former times God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see.* [7]

4. **Images of saints and angels affirm the communion of the saints**. As a teenage Anglican reciting the Apostles' Creed I used to wonder what 'the communion of the saints' really meant. It was something I was willing to consent to mentally, but I had no conception of how, or if, this could be a reality. It was only on encounter with icons and their becoming part of my everyday life that the saints became for living people, like older brothers and sisters.
5. **Iconography affirms that the call of the human person is union with God**. We were created to be more than merely obedient, moral people. We are each called to be deified, to be a holy mountain overshadowed by divine glory, to be like the bush that Moses beheld, aflame with the Holy Spirit but not consumed. As St Peter wrote, we have been granted many promises that by these we might "become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Icons' haloes, their golden backgrounds, the radiance of their faces all attest to this high calling. This deification is of course granted only by grace, but it is nevertheless the intended state of the human person fully alive.
6. **The specific veneration we pay to holy images and to saints helps us to recognise the image of God in all those people whom we meet in everyday life**. If only we saw the profound mystery of the human person made by God and in His image, then we would fall down in veneration of all others. Inasmuch as we show love for His creatures we show love for Christ. Although only the saints are likenesses of God, all people, sinners and virtuous alike, remain in His image.
7. **The special beauty of good iconography is a powerful missionary tool**. Too many have been put off Christianity by overly legalistic terminology used to explain the Gospel. If instead we explain salvation as the restoration of the beautiful image of God in man then we are closer to reality. God is then seen as Beauty, and life with Him as beautiful, although entailing suffering and struggle.
8. **Traditional iconography shows creation redeemed, grace bearing, as a burning bush**. The style of traditional iconography, be it Romanesque, Byzantine or whatever, shows a world seen with the eye of the heart and not merely with the eyes of the body. It shows things bathed in and radiant with shekenna glory, for the Logos not only created the world but keeps it

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[6] Epitome of the Definition of the Iconoclastic Council held in Constantinople, 754 AD. Trans. from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Series II, 2-14 (NPNF2), ed. P. Schaff, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892), p. 550.
[7] *On Divine Images*, 1.16.

in existence 'by the word of His power' (Hebrews 1:3). I recall frescoing a chapel in Greece some years ago. Between the life-size standing saints I painted trees to suggest paradise, and used actual branches from the surrounding vegetation as my models. This profoundly affected the way that I afterwards saw these trees outside. After painting them for eight to twelve hours a day in church in their paradisiacal state I would go outside and see the surrounding forest burning with divine grace. The trees were no longer mere trees but bushes burning with glory without being consumed.

The relationship between the form or style of any iconography and the world view that it expresses has a critical bearing on how to understand Christian art up to the Gothic period, after which, I would assert, Western art began to have a more anthropocentric rather than theocentric vision of the world. Opinions vary as to whether a difference in theology lies behind this different approach to icon making, or whether it is purely a matter of custom.

The seeds of this divergence may well be traceable as far back as 790 A.D., to the adverse reaction of Charlemagne and his court to the Second Council of Nicaea, as expressed in the *Libri Carolini* (790) and in the Council of Frankfurt (794). Here, the Carolingian texts talk of icons being

> *the work of the artist's imagination*

This contrasts with the Seventh Ecumenical Council which asserted that

> *the making of icons does not depend upon the invention of painters, but expresses the approved legislation and tradition of the Catholic Church...*"[8]

There is not of course just one stylistic way of expressing this transfigured view of the world. The Anglo-Saxon, Carolingian, Romanesque, Byzantine and Russian schools are all speaking the same message of Pentecost. But this diversity does not imply that the Church should embrace every passing fashion in art. The Church needs to discern the effect on the soul of a given formal means.

And above all the Church need not be passive, awaiting what the secular art world has to offer. Drawing upon the wisdom of its own past tradition of iconography, the Church should actively seek ways of expressing its unique vision of the human person and the cosmos transfigured. And for this it needs to train and nurture professional liturgical artists who possess artistic skill, know their theology, and know Christ. The high standards we set for church singing, preaching and architecture we need also to set for liturgical art.

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[8] Second Council of Nicaea, Session Six: Mansi, *Conclia,* xiii, col. 252BC . English translation by K. Ware in 'The Theology of the Icon: A Short Anthology' from *The Eastern Churches Review*, Volume 8, Number 1: Spring 1976, p.7.