

ΕΙΚΣΥΑ

(Icons)

The icon (or its absence) is central to the theology, and indeed to the world-view of those cultures which derive their traditions from the Eastern Roman Empire. The use of these images (by the iconodules or lovers of icons) and their rejection (by the iconoclasts or breakers of icons) sparked off one of the great controversies of the Orthodox Churches. The crisis caused by this controversy is one of the contributing factors that allowed the Bishop of Rome to make a play for power in establishing the Western (or Catholic) Rite, independent of the Metropolitan of Constantinople.

For an iconodule, the image itself is a magical object of veneration. This is not because it is itself Holy, but because it stands as a reflection or shadow of God. By possessing similarity (it depicts all "the characteristic features of a holy person or a sacred event in accordance with authentic sources"^{1[1]} - such as the lion and a gospel for St Mark) and being made in a reverential and prayerful manner, it has taken on some of the aura of God. The viewer who approaches the icon of Jesus thus approaches Jesus.

The use of the icon as a magical actuality that enabled the worship to see an part of the real saint or place^{2[2]} helps explain the lack of comprehension that the Byzantines had of the Crusades and pilgrimage generally. A devout believer need not go to the physical sites, for cleansing, as they could contact those sites by going to any well decorated church.

Χρωλφ

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^{1[1]} Demus p 7

^{2[2]} This theory is no weirder than the Miracle of Trans-substantiation (the bread and wine of the Sacrament are converted to the actual Body and Blood of Christ), generally accepted within the Catholic Church today, but heresy within most of the Middle Ages.