

Géza Xeravits (ed.), *Iconography in Ecumenism*, Pápa Budapest: Reformed Theological Academy of Pápa L'Harmattan, 2005, 143 pp.

This volume is the outcome of an ecumenical scholarly meeting held at the Reformed Theological Academy in Pápa, 2004. It consists of seven studies dealing with the question of religious images from different theological perspectives. This undertaking promises to be especially interesting in a country with such a diverse denominational map, rooted in both Western and Eastern Christianity, strongly blended with Protestantism. The first paper, István Karasszons "Imageless, Israel?" derives the Second Commandment from the cult-centralizing tendencies of the Deuteronomical theology and thus relativizes the image prohibition of the Old Testament. Having demonstrated that a tradition of sacred images in fact existed in Israel, it expounds a chronology and other results of recent investigation (e.g. on the radical monotheistic "Yahweh-alone-party").

In his study entitled "The Dogma-Historical Background of the Icon Veneration" István Baán gives a detailed history of image theology before the Byzantine iconoclasm. He then discusses the doctrine of icon veneration based on the teaching of John Damascenus. It is only regrettable that the Western reception of the Eastern developments is treated in very brief terms, in spite of its importance for the later history of theology. Géza Nagymihályi's "Image Veneration in the Byzantine Christianity" characterizes the icon as part of the Byzantine "Gesamtkunstwerk" and as expression of a particular world image. The author claims that "the eikon is not the violation of or an opposition to the Old Testament's prohibition, but on the contrary: it is the fulfillment of the Law" (p. 41). Finally, he lists Hungarian Greek Catholic and Orthodox examples of Byzantine art.

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The purpose of the study titled "Catholicism and Icon Painting" by Szilveszter Terdik remains unclear. It depicts the attitude changes of Roman Catholicism toward the art of icons, from early interactions to later estrangement and the "icon revival" in the twentieth-century (an interview with a contemporary Russian icon painter is attached in the annex). Nevertheless, the ambiguities of modern Catholic church art would deserve a separate investigation. The constant references to Hungarian Greek Catholics lack reflection on their controversial relationship to icons, but the final presentation of contemporary Hungarian icon painters proves to be a valuable material.

In his "Iconography and the Reformed Confession of Faith" Sándor Békési points out that whereas the Heidelberg Catechism rejects images based on the Old Testament commandment, the Second Helvetic Creed argues philosophically for the impossibility of representing God. Calvinist sacred art prefers using symbols, while it acknowledges the autonomy of arts and played a significant role in secularizing them. In

the paper "(Patristic) Exegetical and Liturgical Background of Rublev's Troitsa" Atanáz Orosz demonstrates alternative angelological, christological and trinitarian interpretations of Gen. 18:1-14. He analyzes how the representation became a theological synthesis inasmuch as the artist emphasized its trinitarian character by "giving face" to the persons of Trinity, thus highlighting individuality, unity, and equality simultaneously.

The last essay titled "There will be no more time... The Icon as Liturgical Image and the Iconography of the Orthodox Churches" by Gergely A. Nacsinák contrasts the iconographic theology of Orthodoxy with the image concept of the Western Church. It emphasizes the liturgical embeddedness of icons, characterized as places, where corporeal and spiritual recognition overlap, and instruments of sanctifying the material world.

Beside the undeniable merits of this book some shortcomings have to be mentioned. The interreligious perspective appears only once, in the study on Judaism, but there is no single hint at the Islamic position. Even more disappointing is the absence of the ecumenical perspective, although this might have been the main purpose of the original meeting. There is no actual communication beyond the conversation; each participant recites the viewpoints of his own denomination, failing to achieve common ground with the others. It also remains undetermined throughout the whole text whether the term 'iconography' refers to religious images in general, whether it applies only to a certain type of images representing God (and saints), or it refers to the art of icon painting.

Finally, it is somewhat puzzling that no Roman Catholic or Lutheran contributors participated in the project. Greek Catholic opinions--four of a total of seven--beside two Calvinists and one Orthodox outnumber the rest; yet only around three percent of the Hungarian population belong to this religious subgroup. Or does this disturbing omission perhaps suggest that Greek Catholics are the only ones who really have something worthwhile to say about iconography in this country?

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