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The Degraded Iconicity of the Icon The Icon's Materiality and Mechanical Reproduction

The Degraded Iconicity of the Icon examines the challenges facing the traditional doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox icon in a society subsumed by simulacra and seduced by the allure of appearances. Today, the idea of a "holy image" seems anachronistic and the icon rapidly loses definition as a concrete liturgical, symbolic and mysteriological object, within the life of the Orthodox Church. It tends to become another mere "image" in the abstract, one among thousands, having no need for *proper embodiment*. In other words, the mechanical reproduction gradually begins to determine what we are to expect from the icon, which then becomes a shadow of itself. Once again the simulacrum threatens to supplant reality. Consequently, the subtleties of traditional materials and craftsmanship, which play a crucial role in the realization of the icon's anagogic function, are completely undermined and its theological significance as a pictorial expression of the Incarnation and deification of matter begins to shatter. Finally, the icon ceases to be a lucid mirror of the Real; we end up with "degraded iconicity."

In order to reverse this symptom it is first crucial to understand that the symbolism of the icon's materiality is not arbitrary, but rather based on metaphysical principles. This requires of us the discernment of the Logos as He is manifested in the inherent qualities of materials in Creation. An ideal icon, having "fullness of iconicity", retains not only the canonical forms, but also the material nuances of its traditional craftsmanship, thereby fulfilling to its anagogic and symbolic function within the liturgical aesthetic experience. This entails the use of the best materials available, preferably natural or organic materials, since these, unlike most synthetic products, in their inherent properties best reflect the glory of God - Beauty - in Creation. Icon reproductions, in so far as they deny the symbolic role of materials, are drastically impoverished for liturgical use and mainly reflect the encroachment of profane industry into sacred space.