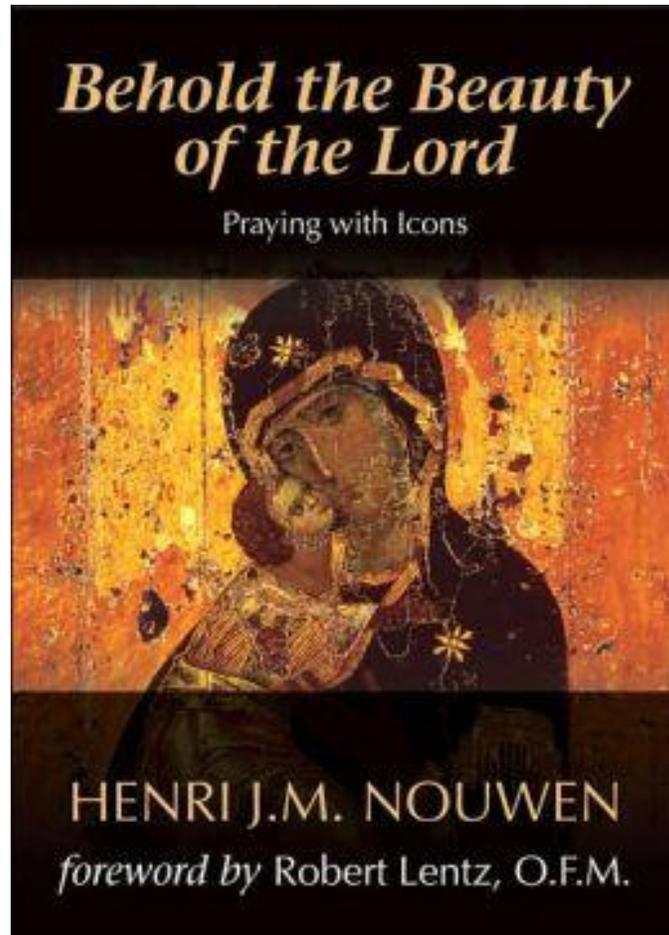


*A Study Guide for*

*Behold the Beauty of the Lord  
Praying with Icons*



by

Henri J.M. Nouwen

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## THE WORD ICON AS IT OCCURS IN THE SCRIPTURES

The word *icon* is a transliteration of the Greek word *εἰκὼν* and is found in the New Testament, particularly in the letters of the apostle Paul. While most Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians are familiar with the biblical theme of Jesus as the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1-14), Orthodox Christians also celebrate the biblical theme of Jesus as the Icon or Image of God. The icons found in Orthodox Churches are a celebration of the fact that Jesus Christ is indeed the Word of God made flesh and that anyone who has seen Jesus has seen the Father (John 12:45 and 14:8-12). As the 7th Ecumenical Council held in the city of Nicea in 787AD proclaimed, icons are in color what the Scriptures are in words: witnesses to the incarnation, the fact that God has come among us as a person whom we can see, touch and hear. In fact, in the traditional language of the Church, icons are not simply painted but written and an iconographer is "one who writes icons."

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Below are listed four of the places that the word icon is found in the original Greek text of the New Testament. Normally translated by the English words "image" or "likeness" in the New King James Version, the New Revised Standard Version and the New International Version, in the texts given below the transliterated word "icon" has been left in the text.

### THE WORD ICON APPLIED TO JESUS CHRIST

"He [Jesus] is the *icon* of the invisible God" (*Colossians 1:15*).

"In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the *icon* of God" (*2 Corinthians 4:4*).

### HUMAN BEINGS IN THE CHURCH

"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the *icon* of its Creator" (*Colossians 3:10*).

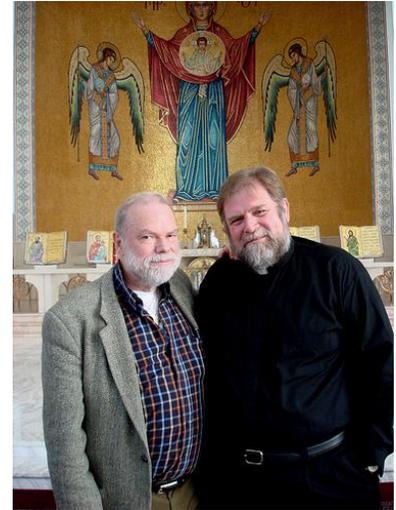
"And we all, with unveiled face, reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His *icon* from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is Spirit" (*2 Corinthians 3:18*).

*Concerning this last verse: do you see yourself as being changed into His icon by the Spirit? That this is precisely what the Christian life is? How do you reflect the glory of the Lord in your life?*

## INTRODUCTION: The Place of Icons in the Life of Henri Nouwen

by Jim Forest

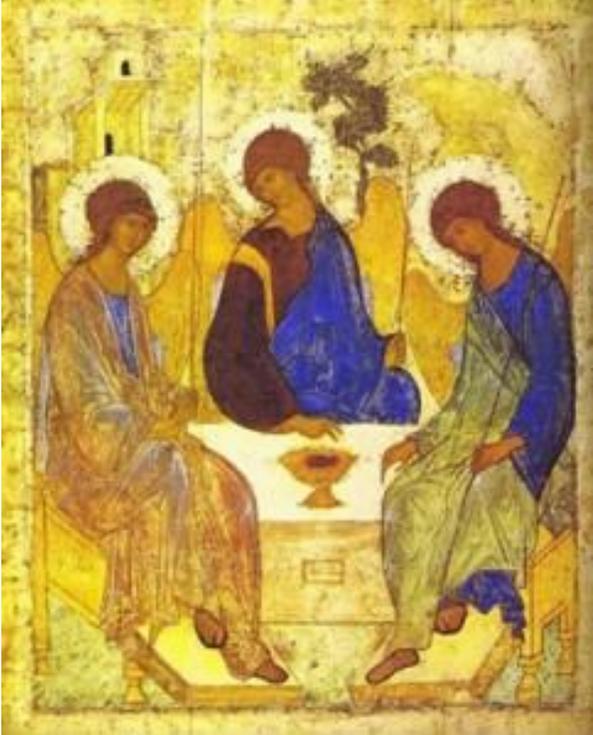
Henri managed to write a book on icons: *Behold the Beauty of the Lord*. This thin volume remains among the best introductions to icons — very accessible, not at all technical, with a directness and sobriety that one can only describe as icon-like. With his usual immediacy, Henri explains how one icon and then others gained a place in his life and what he had so far learned from long periods of living with four of them: St. Andrei Rublev’s Holy Trinity icon, an icon of Mary holding Christ in her arms, an icon of the face of Christ (also by Rublev), and finally an icon of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles at Pentecost.



Of course Henri had seen icons in art history books, museums, churches and monasteries many times, but it wasn’t until his first visit to the L’Arche community in Trosly, France, in 1983 that he began to see icons with wide-open eyes. Barbara Swanekamp, assistant to L’Arche founder Jean Vanier, had put a reproduction of Rublev’s icon of the Holy Trinity on the table of the room where Henri would be staying. “After gazing for many weeks at the icon,” Henri noted in *Behold the Beauty of the Lord*, “I felt a deep urge to write down what I had gradually learned to see.”

I remember Henri coming to visit us in Holland following his stay at Trosly. He was very excited about the gift he had brought with him, a reproduction of the Holy Trinity icon he had bought that morning in a shop in Paris. Though he had not yet seen the actual icon — it was in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow — yet he was confident that the print came as close to the real thing as print technology would allow.

Though I had seen icons from time to time, until that day I had taken only a meager interest in them. It wasn’t until Henri’s visit that finally I began to see them with a similar excitement. I vividly recall sitting at Henri’s side as he explored, with childlike fascination, every tiny detail of the Holy Trinity icon. I think he remarked first on the utterly submissive faces of the three angelic figures, each inclined toward the other, in a silent dialogue of love. He considered their profound stillness and yet warmth and vitality. Then we looked at the colors Andrei Rublev had chosen, though even the best reproduction can only hint at what Rublev had actually achieved, as I was to see for myself not long afterward when I first visited the Tretyakov Gallery. Henri traced the perfect circle that invisibly contained the three angels. Then he traced a cross within the circle and then the triangle it also contained. All this significant geometry reveals the icon’s theology yet none of it is heavy-handed. Then there was the table around with the three figures were placed — the Eucharistic altar with golden chalice. Above the three figures were three objects: a house with an open door, a tree, and a mountain. The doorless building is the Church.



The tree is the Tree of Life and also the Life-giving Cross. The mountain is the Mountain of the Beatitudes.

Henri also spoke about what the history of the icon, how Rublev had painted it as the principal icon for the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity where the body of St. Sergius of Radonezh had been placed. St. Sergius, one of Russia's most beloved saints, was a monk and woodworker who lived in the 14th Century. He left no writings. The only words that come down to us from St. Sergius are these: "The contemplation of the Holy Trinity destroys all enmity." Through this icon standing a few meters from the burial place of St. Sergius, Rublev sought to provide the opportunity for the contemplation of the Holy Trinity.

Henri linked icons with the question: "What do we really choose to see?" It is a matter of enormous importance what we look at and how we look at it. "It makes a great difference," Henri noted, "whether we see a flower or a snake, a gentle smile or menacing teeth, a dancing couple or a hostile crowd. We do have a choice. Just as we are responsible for what we eat, so we are responsible for what we see. It is easy to become a victim of the vast array of visual stimuli surrounding us. The 'powers and principalities' control many of our daily images. Posters, billboards, television, videos, movies and store windows continuously assault our eyes and inscribe their images upon our memories. We do not have to be passive victims of a world that wants to entertain and distract us. We can make decisions and choices. A spiritual life in the midst of our energy-draining society requires us to take conscious steps to safeguard that inner space where we can keep our eyes fixed on the beauty of the Lord."

Henri proposed a theology of seeing, or gazing, the verb he preferred. To really see something beautiful, such as a well-painted icon, so that its beauty becomes a sacramental reality, one has to do much more than glance. For Nouwen, the icon is the primary visual art of the Church — if not the door of the Church, then the window. Nor could he see it as something meaningful apart from the totality of the Church. The icon becomes a dead plant when it becomes simply a "work of art," a "collector's item," an aesthetic object. Like the Bible, the icon is made by the Church and guarded by the Church. The icon is a witness to the truths the Church lives by. Each icon has dogmatic content. For example, any icon of Christ in the arms of his mother reminds us that he took flesh in the flesh of her body. Christ's bare feet seen in the Virgin of Vladimir icon are a reminder that he was fully human, walking on the same earth that we do. Though an infant he is shown dressed as an emperor because in reality, he continually rules the cosmos. For Nouwen, icons were intimately connected with the Church, Eucharistic life and daily prayer.

# Study Guide Discussion and Questions

*Discussion Guide to Be Completed Before Session 1*

## Session 1: The Icon of the Holy Trinity

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**Read pp. 16-42**

In this book Henri Nouwen introduces the reader to the Orthodox Christian practice of using the visual aid of icons to center the mind and heart in prayer.

*“Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God” – Matthew 5:8*

### *Introduction*

1. Henri writes that his “spiritual life had become...connected with the beauty of icons” (p. 9). What has been your experience of icons? How is *your* spiritual life connected with the beauty of icons? How have the icons of Christ and the saints, so prominent in our Churches, brought you closer to Him? Have you ever thought of memorizing an icon (p. 22) the way you would the Lord’s Prayer? Do you think of icons as being “intimately connected with the experience of love” (p. 23) and “offering access to the mystery of the invisible” (p. 23)? Have you ever meditated on an icon, allowing it to lead you “into the inner room of prayer” and bring you “close to the heart of God” (p. 23)?
2. Think of all the visual stimuli you encounter on a daily basis on TV, in movies, video games, posters, billboards, the internet, etc. How much of what you see on a daily basis is actually spiritually healthy rather than spiritually destructive? Henri writes: “Just as we are responsible for what we eat, so we are responsible for what we see” (p. 12). Do you agree? If so, what do you do to filter out visual stimuli that drain you spiritually? How do you choose images that nourish you spiritually?

### **Chapter 1: The Icon of the Holy Trinity – *Living in the House of Love***

The first meditation is based on an icon of the Trinity painted in 1425 by the famous Russian iconographer and - since 1988 - canonized saint of the Church, Andrei Rublev (1360-1427) to honor St. Sergius of Radonezh (1313-1392), a monastic reformer who is today venerated as one of the most important saints in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church.

### *Introduction*

3. What was your initial reaction to this icon? As you read Henri’s reflections on what he is able to see in this icon, can you see what he sees? What else do you see?

### *Where Heart Speaks to Heart*

4. “The Russian mystics describe prayer as descending with the mind into the heart and standing there in the presence of God” (p. 35). How can meditating on this icon help us connect our minds with our hearts? Why is this so important for Christian living?
5. This icon is also called “The Hospitality of Abraham” in our tradition and is based on the story of Abraham and Sarah told in Genesis 18:1-15 where an appearance of three angels to Abraham near Hebron is seen as a pre-figuration of the revelation of the Holy Trinity. Reflect on the symbolic links that Henri makes between the icon of the Holy Trinity and the biblical stories of Abraham and Sarah and of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). What details in the icon justify these links? (Read pp. 35-37.)

### *The Circle, the Cross and Liberation*

6. Henri states: “There is indeed no circle without a cross, no life eternal without death, no gaining life without losing it, no heavenly kingdom without Calvary” (p. 39). How do you understand the paradoxes of this statement?
7. Henri names a number of individuals that have walked “the way of Jesus” like Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador (p. 40). Can you think of others? List ten relatively contemporary saints that you are aware of. (For example: St. Nektarios, who died in 1920.)

### *Conclusion*

8. What does “praying at all times” mean to you? Do you share Henri’s interpretation (pp. 41-42)?
9. Does the icon of the Trinity evoke any additional responses in you?



*St. Andrei Rublev (c. 1360 – 1427) whose memory is celebrated on January 29th painting the icon of the Trinity*

## What is an icon?

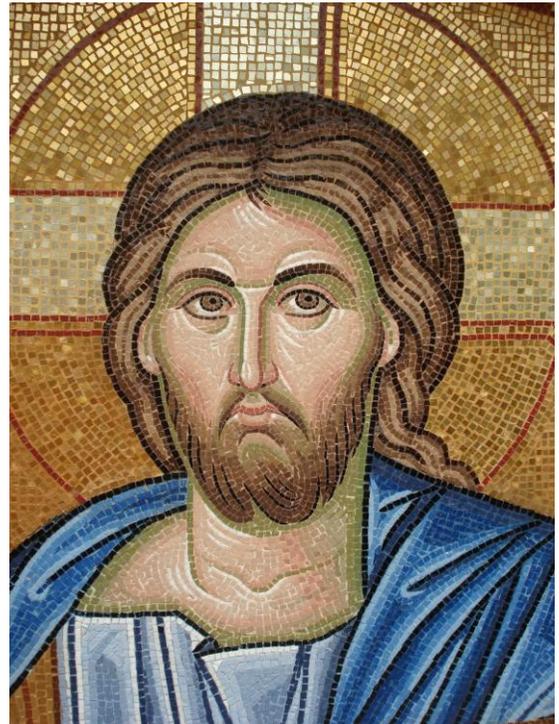
One thing I ask from the LORD, this alone do I seek:  
to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,  
to **behold the beauty of the LORD** and to seek Him in His temple.

- *Psalm 27:4*

Christianity is the revelation not only of the Word of God but also the Image of God in the face of Christ. "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). According to the Scriptures we are not only to *hear* the Word of God, we are also to *see* the Word of God. We see the face of God in the face of Christ.

The icon is a door through which we enter Reality. The purpose of an icon is to take us into the realm of the Spirit. The icon is not merely a work of art. It is a work of Christian witness. It offers us Truth as a vision, always remembering the words of the Gospel that "I am the...Truth" (John 14:6).

An icon is therefore an image of the invisible, a reflection of the Beyond. An icon is dogma and theology in colors. It is an expression of spiritual experience, of mystical life, of worship and surrender. It is a reflection of divine Beauty. It points us beyond itself and is a window upon eternity, a point at which the present world intersects with the Kingdom that is to come. Every icon is intended to be a marriage between the terrestrial and the celestial. And, through this window, not only do we look from this world into the Kingdom: our gaze is met by the eyes of another who looks out from the Kingdom and holds us in his or her gaze. The icon offers a Presence.



An icon is silent. But an icon's silence is not empty. The silence of an icon is the silence of Christ and invites prayer. It is prayer just to look attentively at an icon and let it speak to you out of the divine silence of His living Word. To gaze at an icon in the correct attitude of devotion is to acquire the proper orientation of our vision, thought, desire and will: the face of God in the face of Christ, the splendor of the Kingdom, the divine destiny that is the vocation of every living soul. An icon radiates joy and peace. It is a luminous celebration of life, an expression of God's victory over sin and death.

"There is only one face in the whole world that is absolutely beautiful: the face of Christ."

- *Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881)*

## Session 2: The Icon of the Virgin of Vladimir

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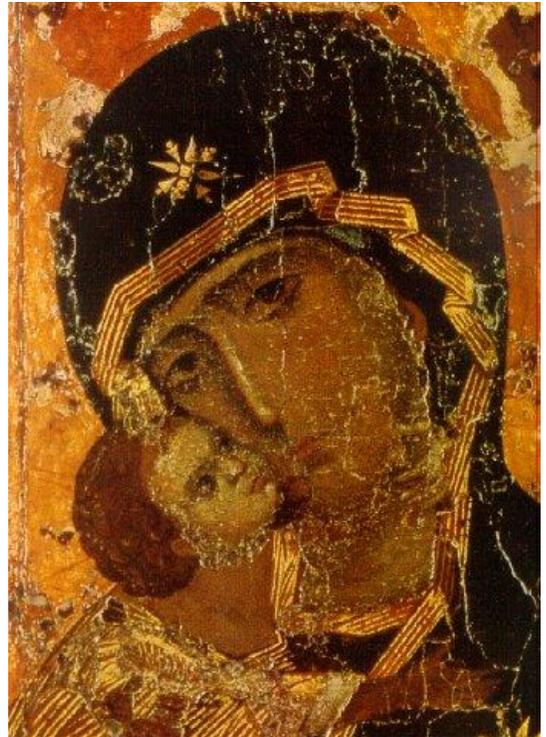
**Read pp. 46-63**

### Chapter 2: The Icon of the Virgin of Vladimir – *Belonging to God*

*"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." - John 1:14*

#### ***Introduction***

The most revered icon in medieval Russia, “Our Lady of Vladimir” was painted in Constantinople by an unknown Byzantine iconographer in the 12th century and brought to Kiev, then taken to Vladimir and ultimately – from 1480-1918 – to Moscow, where it was housed in the Assumption Cathedral in the Kremlin. It is today kept in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. Belonging to that period of Byzantine art called “the Macedonian Renaissance” by art historians, in medieval Russia, this type of icon was called “umilenie” or “tenderness” and for centuries served as *the* prototype for Russian iconographers painting the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child.



1. Henri begins the chapter on the icon of the Virgin of Vladimir by asking what he believes is “the core question of the spiritual life: To whom do we belong?” (p. 46). How would you answer that question for yourself? To whom do you belong? Do you belong more to the world or to God and His people? ***Read Ephesians 2:19-22.***

#### ***The Eyes of the Virgin***

1. Henri says that the Virgin’s “eyes look inward and outward” at the same time. Her “eyes gaze upon the infinite spaces of the heart where joy and sorrow are no longer contrasting emotions, but are transcended in spiritual unity” (p. 49). Look carefully at the eyes of the Theotokos in this icon. What feelings do her eyes evoke in you?
2. How do you understand Henri’s statement that “Mary’s motherhood completes her virginity, and her virginity completes her motherhood” (pp. 49-50)?

4. Describe and comment on the ways that Mary's gaze in this icon is different from the gaze of an ordinary mother (pp. 49-50).
5. Living as close as we do to Hollywood and the film industry, and with all the new social media like Facebook and Twitter, what do you make of Henri's comment that "we so much want to be looked at that we are ill prepared to be truly seen" (p. 51) – especially in today's world? Is it possible to be looked at without truly being seen? What does this mean for the quality of our relationships with one another?

### ***The Hands of the Virgin***

1. In describing the Virgin's left hand, Henri states: "In its centrality it summarizes the entire icon" (p. 35). Do you see "the Virgin's gesture as a gentle invitation to move closer to Jesus" as Henri does? As a summary of Mary's song (Read Luke 1:46)? Do you see how the depiction of the Virgin in this icon invites us to worship Jesus (p. 53)? How do you understand this?
2. In the Virgin's hands Henri sees her patience. Why is her patience so important (pp. 54-55)?

### ***The Child and the Virgin***

1. How does the iconographer portray the child as the Word of God (pp. 55-56)?
2. Reflect on the importance of light in this icon (pp. 56-57).
3. How does the child's tender embrace of His mother reveal God's tender love for humanity? (pp. 58-59)
4. In what ways is the relationship between the child and His mother a reciprocal one (pp. 59-60)?

### ***Conclusion***

1. In what way does Henri see the presence of the Father in this icon (pp. 61-62)?
2. Henri asks: "What else is eternal life than to be lifted up into the house of God and made a participant in the intimate communion between the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit? (p. 62). **Read John 14:20, 23.** What does it mean to have Christ and His Father – our Father – dwell in us? How has a meditation on this icon moved you closer to this goal?
3. Do you agree with Henri's observation that "the Virgin of Vladimir is the iconographic articulation" of John 3:16 (p. 62)? Why or why not?

## *Do you love the Mother of God?*

by Jim Forest



I recall an experience involving a Protestant friend, Hannes de Graaf, who taught theology for many years at the University of Utrecht. As a young man his interest in the novels of Dostoevsky led him to learn Russian, a language which he put to good use later in life, during the Cold War, when he would occasionally travel to Russia to make contact with Christians.

One day he was in an Orthodox Church in Moscow, standing in front of an icon when an elderly Russian woman approached him. She could see at a glance that Hannes was a foreigner. Few Russians could afford such clothing. And she could see he wasn't Orthodox — he hadn't crossed himself, he hadn't kissed the icon. He was looking at it as one might look at a painting in a museum. "Where do you come from?" she asked. "Holland," Hannes replied. "Oh yes, Holland. And are there believers in

Holland?" "Yes, most people in Holland belong to a church." But he could see the doubt in her face.

She began to cross-examine him. "And you also are a believer?" "Yes, in fact I teach theology at the university." "And people in Holland, they go to church on Sunday?" "Yes, most people go to church. We have churches in every town and village." "And they believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit?" She crossed herself as she said the words. "Oh yes," Hannes assured her, but the doubt in her face increased — why had he not crossed himself?

Then she looked at the icon and asked, "And do you love the Mother of God?" Now Hannes was at a loss and stood for a moment in silence. Good Protestant Calvinist that he was, he could hardly say yes. Then he said, "I have great respect for her." "Such a pity," she replied in a pained voice, "but I will pray for you." Immediately she crossed herself, kissed the icon and stood before it in prayer.

"Do you know," Hannes told me years later, "from that day I have loved the Mother of God."

## Session 3: The Icon of Christ the Savior

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**Read pp. 66-84**

### Chapter 3: The Icon of the Savior of Zvenigorod – *Seeing Christ*

*“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” - John 14:9*

#### ***Introduction***

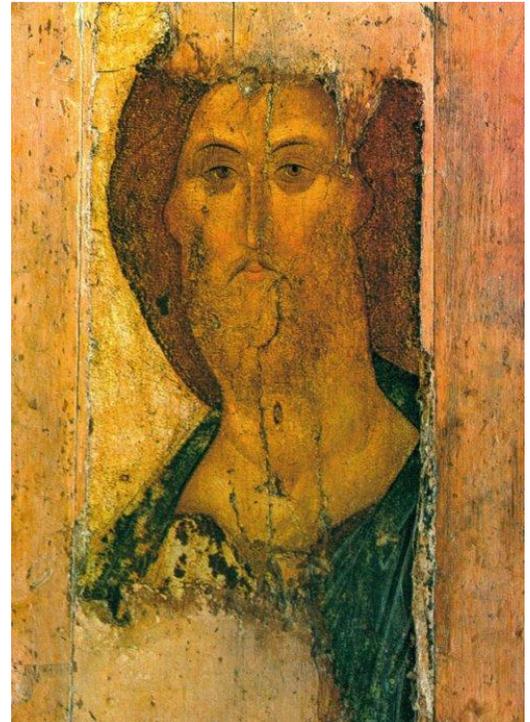
1. Henri writes about images/portraits that have helped him see the face of Jesus more clearly. Do you have a favorite painting of Jesus by other Christian artists like Giotto, Rembrandt or El Greco?

#### ***Seeing a Damaged Image***

1. “This largely destroyed icon was found in a barn in 1918 near the Cathedral of the Assumption in Zvenigorod,” Henri writes (p. 69). How does the damage this icon has suffered over the centuries shape Henri’s understanding of its meaning?
2. Henri says: “The history of this icon, a history of loss and rediscovery, holds both a warning and reassurance” (p. 70). Explain what he means. How does this interpretation speak to you?

#### ***Seeing a Most Tender Human Face***

1. When you meditate on this icon, gazing attentively and prayerfully at Christ, do you have a sense of the movement that Henri sees in it (pp. 71-72)? What does it mean to you to have Jesus turn toward you?
2. Look deeply into the eyes of Christ in this icon. Do you understand the Apostle Peter’s tears of repentance and gratitude (p. 49)?
3. Henri writes that: “Rublev wanted to accentuate the humanity of Christ more than his predecessors had done” (p. 72). How has Rublev portrayed Jesus’ humanity? What in the icon inspires a sense of awe and joy in Henri? Does it inspire this in you?



### ***Seeing Eyes that Penetrate Both the Heart of God and Every Human Heart***

1. Do you understand how the eyes of Christ as they are depicted in this icon could bring to Henri's mind the words of Psalm 139? Can you see the "loving care" in the eyes of Christ, eyes that Henri describes as overflowing with "a divine mercy"? (pp. 78-79)
2. How does Jesus' gaze in this icon lead us into the mystery of the Incarnation? (p. 80)
3. Henri writes that in Christ, "we can see God and live!" Do you recognize this as a reference to Exodus 33:20 when God said to Moses, "you cannot see my face for no one can see me and live." Compare what the Lord Jesus says in response to Philip's request for Jesus to show him the Father by reading John 14:9.
4. What do you experience when you look at Jesus' eyes in this icon?

### ***Conclusion***

1. Henri describes seeing Rublev's Christ as "a sacred event in which contemplation and compassion are one, and in which we are prepared for an eternal life of seeing" (p. 84). Does this icon give you a sense of the sacred? If so, what elements affect you the most?



***The 14th century icon of the Resurrection by an unknown iconographer in the Church of our Savior in Constantinople (modern Istanbul)***

# Praying with Icons: the qualities of an Icon

by Jim Forest

***“It is the task of the iconographer to open our eyes to the actual presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.”*** — Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

A good icon is a work of beauty and beauty itself bears witness to God. Perhaps for those beginning to form a deeper appreciation of icons, some general comments about the essential qualities of an icon may be helpful.

***An icon is an instrument for the transmission of Christian faith***, no less than the written word. Through sacred imagery, the Holy Spirit speaks to us, revealing truths beyond the reach of words.

***Icons are an aid to worship***. Wherever an icon is set, that place more easily becomes an area of prayer. The icon is not an end in itself but assists us in going beyond what can be seen with our physical eyes into the realm of mystical experience.

***The icon is a work of tradition***. Just as the hands of many thousands of bakers stand invisibly behind each loaf of homemade bread, the icon is more than the personal meditation of an individual artist, but the fruit of many generations of believers uniting us to the witnesses of the resurrection. ***Read 2 Thessalonians 2:15*** about the necessity of holding on to tradition.

***The icon is silent***. No mouths are open nor are there any other physical details which imply sound. But an icon’s silence is not empty. The stillness and silence of the icon, in the home no less than church, create an area that constantly invites prayer.

***The icon is concerned solely with the sacred***. Through line and color, the iconographer seeks to convey the awesomeness of the invisible and divine Reality and lead the viewer to a deeper awareness of the divine Presence.

***The icon is a work of theology*** written in line, images and color. Part of the Church’s response to heresy has been articulated through iconography. For example, the bare feet of the child Jesus shown in many icons serve as a reminder that He walked the earth and left His imprint — that He was not simply a spirit who gave the appearance of being human.

***The icon is not intended to force an emotional response***. There is a conscious avoidance of movement or theatrical gesture in iconography. In portraying moments of biblical history, the faces of participants in the scene are rarely expressive of their feelings as we might imagine them, but rather suggest virtues — purity, patience in suffering, forgiveness, compassion and love. For example, in crucifixion icons, emphasis is not placed on the physical pain Christ

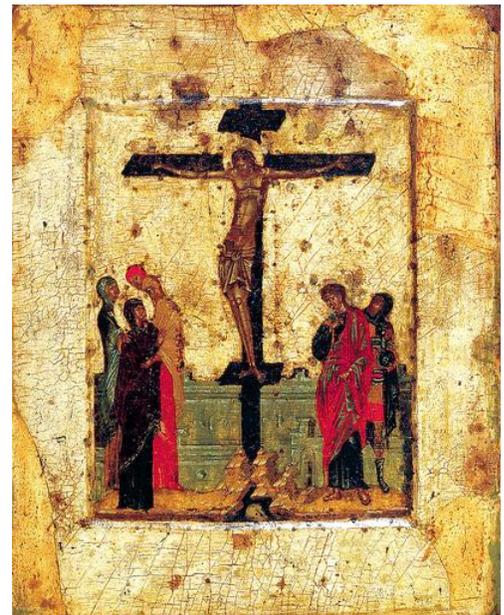
endured on the cross. The icon reveals what led Him to the cross: the free act of giving His life for others.

***Icons guard against over-familiarity with the divine.*** An icon of the Savior is not merely a sentimental painting of “our dear friend Jesus,” but portrays both the divinity as well as the humanity of Christ, His absolute demands on us as well as His infinite mercy.

***Icons rely on a minimum of detail.*** There is either nothing at all in the background or, if a setting is required, it is rendered in the simplest, most austere manner.

***Icons have no single light source.*** Iconographers have developed a way of painting which suggests a light source that is within rather than outside. The technique builds light on darkness rather than the other way round. The intention is to suggest the “uncreated light”: the light of the kingdom of God. The icon’s light is meant to illumine whoever stands in prayer before the icon.

***In icons faces are seen frontally*** or in a three-quarters view, the only exceptions being those, like Judas, who have abandoned the kingdom of God. Gazing at the face, we are drawn especially into the eyes, the windows of the soul. The enlightened eyes communicate wisdom, insight, and heightened perception. Meeting the Savior and the saints face-to-face, we find ourselves in a relationship of communion, while a face depicted in profile suggests disconnection and fragmentation.



***Each icon reveals a person who is named.*** An icon of the Savior or any saint is not complete without the inscription of his or her name, except in cases where there are numerous figures on icon. Names connote a person no less than visual representation. “The icon reveals,” notes Father Maximos of Mt. Athos, “not a world of things but a world of persons.”

***The icon is not an editorial or a manifesto.*** The icon painter does not use iconography to promote an ideology or personal opinion. Neither do iconographers decide who ought to be regarded as a saint. The iconographer, having been blessed by the Church to carry on this form of non-verbal theological activity, willingly and humbly works under the guidance of Church canons, tradition, and councils.

***The icon is unsigned.*** It is not a work of self-advertisement. The iconographer avoids stylistic innovations intended to take the place of a signature. This does not preclude the names of certain iconographers being known to us, but we can say that the greater the iconographer, the less he or she seeks personal recognition.

## Session 4: The Icon of Pentecost

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**Read pp. 88-116**

### **Chapter 4: The Icon of the Descent of the Holy Spirit – *Liberating the World***

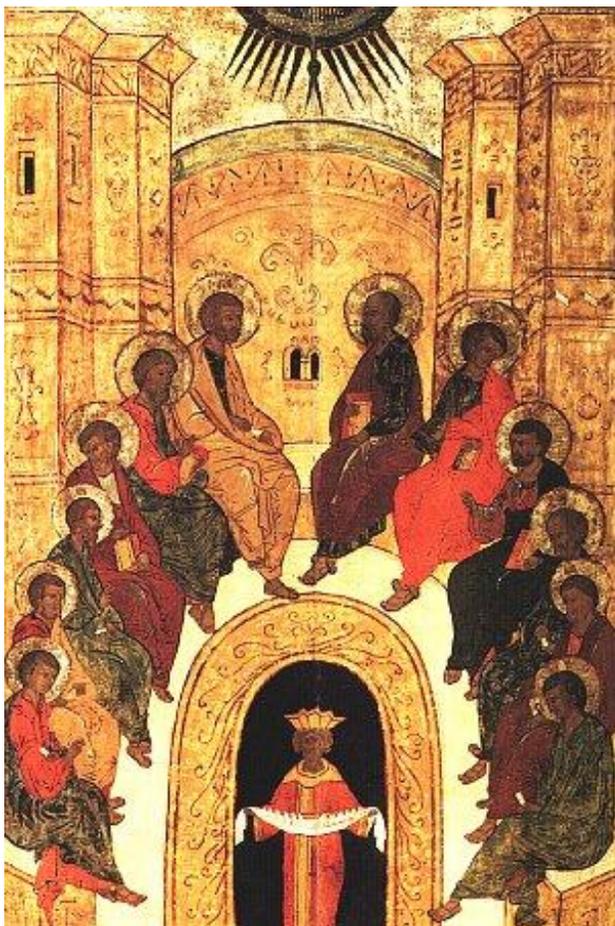
***“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”***

**- 2 Corinthians 13:14**

**Read Acts 2:1-45** before beginning your meditations on the icon of Pentecost.

### ***Introduction***

1. Reflecting on what Henri has written about individualism in the practice of so much contemporary Christianity, to what extent is your spiritual life primarily an individual affair, a “me & Jesus” kind of thing that has little need for the Church, the community of believers established by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost?



2. “We can no longer separate the spiritual life from life in community, belonging to God from belonging to each other, and seeing Christ from seeing one another in Him” (pp. 89-90). Why is community essential to the spiritual life?

### ***The God-Within***

1. How has the iconographer portrayed the deepest, inner meaning of Pentecost and not merely the external events (p. 91)?
2. How does the reality of God-within-us differ from God-for-us and God-with-us – reflecting the realities of the Holy Trinity (pp. 92-95)? Is the presence of the Holy Spirit - God-within-us - a prominent feature in the life of the Orthodox Church?

3. By what means does the iconographer reveal the presence of the Holy Spirit in this icon?

### ***The Community of Faith***

1. In what ways does the community of faith, the Church, represented in this icon differ from ordinary human communities (p. 97)? What are the implications of this for how we are to understand our life together as a community at St. Paul's?
2. Henri writes that in this icon "the mystery of the Church is revealed. What this icon shows so convincingly is that the Church is unity in diversity" (p. 98). How has the artist illustrated this unity in diversity of the church? Would you say that this unity in diversity exists among us here at St. Paul's? What does Henri say binds us together as a community (p. 100)?

### ***Liberating the World***

1. What was your initial reaction to the crowned figure that represents "the cosmos" in darkness at the bottom of the icon? Were you aware of what this figure symbolizes before?
2. Henri explains that this figure "represents all the peoples living in darkness to whom the light of the apostles' teaching has been brought." (p. 103) We are not merely to *kiss* the icon of Pentecost – as Orthodox Christians we are called to *do* the icon of Pentecost. To what extent do you see St. Paul's as succeeding or failing in its mission to evangelize the world? To share the apostles' teaching and the Good News of Christ with everyone? To liberate a world in which so many people are living in darkness, sin and death? Have you ever shared your faith in Christ with anyone?

### ***Conclusion***

1. Henri states that "the mystery of the church and the mystery of the revelation of the inner life of God can never be separated" (p. 107). Look at both the icon of the Holy Trinity and the icon of the Descent of the Holy Spirit and discuss how together they reveal this dual mystery.

### ***Conclusion of the book***

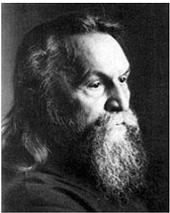
2. In the book's conclusion Henri says: "All four icons speak of a God not hidden in the dazzling splendor of the divine light but reaching out to a world yearning for freedom" (p. 114). Share your experience of praying with icons. Has meditating on these icons given you new insights into God's presence in your life?

## *A Continuing Pentecost*

### *The Holy Spirit in the Liturgy*

The Divine Liturgy is a charismatic, Pentecostal event – an event in which the Holy Spirit makes the Risen and Living Christ present among us. Christ is present in the Divine Liturgy by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, making the Eucharist the source and summit of the Christian life, what St. Maximos the Confessor (580-662AD) called "the mystery of mysteries." And when we are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, we are also participating in what St. Paul and the text of the Liturgy calls "the communion of the Holy Spirit" (2 Corinthians 13:14). In Orthodoxy, the *epiclesis* or invocation, the "calling forth" of the Holy Spirit upon the faithful and the gifts of bread and wine being offered, is an essential element in the Eucharistic action, affirming the fact that ***it is only in and by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Church worships, lives and acts***. The Church is the Body of Christ and it is the Holy Spirit that constitutes the Church on the day of Pentecost, at every baptism and at every Eucharist.

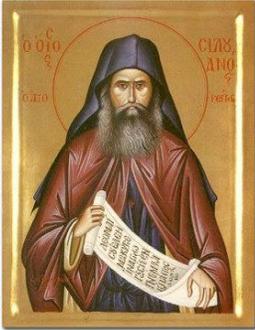
Father Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944) has written that "The Church of Christ is not an institution. It is a new life with Christ and in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit. The Church, as the Body of Christ, is by that very fact the domain where the Holy Spirit works. More: the Church is life in the Spirit because it is the Body of Christ. Those who live in Christ bear within themselves the Holy Spirit and inversely, those who have the Spirit learn the meaning of St. Paul's words, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." It is just this seal of the Spirit, this bearing of the Spirit, which the Orthodox soul seeks and desires above all else."



When in 1968, the late Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius, addressed the World Council of Churches in Uppsala, Sweden, he described the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church in this way: "Without the Holy Spirit God is far away, Christ stays in the past, the Church is merely an organization, authority is a matter of domination, mission a matter of propaganda, the Liturgy no more than an evocation, and Christian living a slave morality. But in the Holy Spirit, the cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth pangs of the Kingdom, the risen Christ is present, the Gospel is the power of Life, the Church shows forth the Holy Trinity, authority is a liberating service, mission is a Pentecost, the Liturgy is both memorial and anticipation and human action is deified."

In the Liturgy, all things are accomplished by God through Christ in the Spirit. Where the Spirit is, there is Christ; and where Christ is, there is the Spirit. As Father Thomas Hopko has written: "Christ is the King and the Spirit is His Kingship; Christ is the Anointed One of God and the Holy Spirit is the unction of His anointing; Christ is the Head of His Body, the Church, and the Holy Spirit fills His Body and gives it life; Christ is the Bridegroom and the Spirit fills his

Bride, the Church; and Christ and the Spirit are perfectly and completely One in their inseparable unity in God, who is love.”



“How happy and blessed are we Orthodox Christians that the Lord has given us life in the Holy Spirit,” wrote St. Silouan of Mt. Athos (1866-1938). “The Holy Spirit lives in our Church in the sacraments, in the holy Scriptures and in the hearts of the faithful. God’s love is known in our Church by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Until I was seven and twenty I simply believed that God was, but I did not know Him. But when my soul knew Him by the Holy Spirit, I was consumed with longing for Him and now, day and night, I seek Him with a burning heart.”

May we all seek the living God with burning hearts!



*Walk in the Spirit!*

- Galatians 5: 16

## *The Gift and Fruit of the Holy Spirit*

To have received "divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit" as we say at every Liturgy and be in communion with God means that no matter who we are or what we look like, whatever language we speak or country we're from, whether we're rich or poor, white, black, red or yellow, God has touched our lives and filled us with the inexpressible joy of His love. God’s love for each and every one of us has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (*Romans 5:5*). Our very bodies have become living temples of the Holy Spirit (*1 Corinthians 3:16*). God has called us to Himself so that we can become, by His grace, like Him in every possible way. God is good, holy, righteous, merciful, true, forgiving, loving and compassionate – and we, as baptized Christians, are given the gift of the Holy Spirit so that these qualities can blossom in us. St. Paul writes, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (*Galatians 5:22*). Does this describe us? Are we open to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts? Are we generous and gentle, kind and loving, patient and joyful? ***Have we allowed the Holy Spirit to be active in our lives so that we can become the living icons of His glory that we're called to be?***

## *A Final Meditation on the Power of Icons*

An excerpt from Thomas Merton's autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*

But after about a week – I don't know how it began – I found myself looking into churches

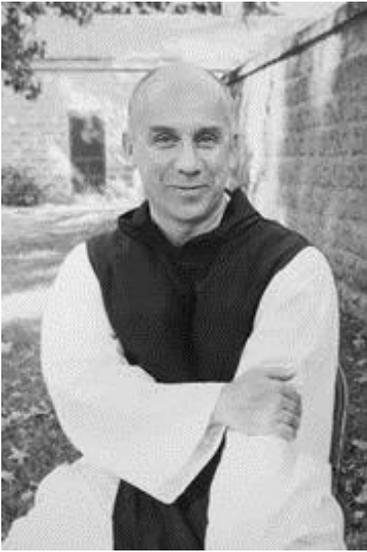


rather than ruined temples. Perhaps it was the frescoes on the wall of an old chapel – ruined, too – at the foot of the Palatine, at the edge of the Forum, that first aroused my interest in another and far different Rome. From there it was an easy step to Sts. Cosmas and Damian, across the Forum, with a great mosaic, in the apse, of Christ coming in judgment in a dark blue sky, with a suggestion of fire in the small clouds beneath His feet. The effect of this discovery was tremendous. After all the vapid, boring, semi-pornographic statuary of the Roman Empire, what a thing

it was to come upon the genius of an art full of spiritual vitality and earnestness and power – an art that was so tremendously serious and alive and eloquent and urgent in all that it had to say. And it was without pretentiousness, without fakery and had nothing theatrical about it. Its solemnity was made all the more astounding by its simplicity – and by the obscurity of the places where it lay hid, and by its subservience to higher ends which I could not even begin to understand, but which I could not avoid guessing, since the nature of the mosaics themselves and their position and everything about them proclaimed it aloud.

I was fascinated by these Byzantine mosaics. I began to haunt the churches where they were found and, as an indirect consequence, all the other churches that were more or less of the same period. And thus without knowing anything about it, I became a pilgrim. I was unconsciously and unintentionally visiting all of the great shrines of Rome, and seeking out their sanctuaries with some of the eagerness and avidity and desire of a true pilgrim, though not quite for the right reason. And yet it was not for the wrong reason either....

And now for the first time in my life I began to find out something of Who this Person was that men called Christ. It was obscure, but it was a true knowledge of Him, in some sense, truer than I knew and truer than I would admit. But it was in Rome that my conception of Christ was formed. It was there I first saw Him, Whom I now serve as my God and King, and Who owns and rules my life. It is the Christ of the Apocalypse, the Christ of the Martyrs, the Christ of the Fathers. It is the Christ of St. John, and of St. Paul and of St. Augustine and St. Jerome and all the Fathers – and of the Desert Fathers.



These mosaics told me more than I had ever known of the doctrine of a God of infinite power, wisdom and love, Who had yet become Man, and revealed in His Manhood the infinity of power, wisdom and love that was His Godhead. Of course, I could not grasp and believe these things explicitly. But since they were implicit in every line of the pictures I contemplated with such admiration and love, surely I grasped them implicitly – I had to, insofar as the mind of the artist reached my own mind. And so I could not help but catch something of the ancient craftsman's love of Christ, the Redeemer and Judge of the World.

My love for these old churches and their mosaics grew from day to day. Soon I was no longer visiting them merely for the art. There was something else that attracted me, a kind of interior peace. I loved to be in these holy places. I had a kind of deep and strong conviction that I belonged there: that my rational nature was filled with profound desires and needs that could only find satisfaction in churches of God.

*A monk at the Abbey of Gethsemani near Louisville, KY*

*Thomas Merton was one of the best known Roman Catholic writers in America during the 20th century. These events, described in Merton's now famous autobiography, and which led to his conversion to Christianity, took place in 1933, when he was 18 years old and visiting Rome.*

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**A final challenge for us: do we, as Orthodox Christians, for whom icons are an integral part of our tradition in ways they are not for Roman Catholics, appreciate icons and see as much in them as Fathers Henri Nouwen and Thomas Merton did?**

**And, if not, what can we do to change this?**

