Holy Images and Worship in the Catholic Church (7.5 ECTS credits)

Level: 1st cycle
Discipline: THEOLOGY (Theological Studies of Culture and Society)
Course ID: 0229

Admission requirements

General entry requirements for studies at universities. Students taking part in the course as a part of their Bachelor's degree program must have completed Course A, Introduction in Philosophy and Theology (30 ECTS credits). Students taking part in the course as a freestanding course are expected to have corresponding prior knowledge.

Educational goals

After having completed the course the students are expected to:
• have formed a historical consciousness of the controversy provoked by images at different times within Christianity and between different religions;
• articulate the arguments expressed by the Church Fathers in favor and against Christian art and critically assess the archaeological, artistic and literary evidence about art in Christianity from the early period to the Middle Ages;
• understand the aesthetic impact of art on communal worship and private prayer, by recognizing different art forms as expressions of the divine and as privileged places of mediation between the physical and the spiritual worlds;
• competently explore issues of appropriateness and inculturation in different artistic phenomena, by reflecting on their relative value.

Course contents

Religious art, whether in the form of holy images or of other sacred objects with iconic figuration, has been from the start a matter of choice rather than necessity, and as such has given rise to numerous controversies and debates in the course of Christian history. What is at stake in art that makes it so central an issue in these theological controversies? This course lays down three paths by which to attempt to answer this important question. The first path is historical: it outlines the development of artistic forms in early Christianity and their growth and diffusion down to the Middle Ages, stressing the links between artistic expression and worship and the different functions that art assumed in the course of the first millennium of Christianity. The second path is theological: using key texts from the Eastern image controversy and patristic sources, it delves into the reasons for and against the use of artistic representation in worship, from the stricter issues of divine representation to the wider application of images of saints and the more specific topic of miraculous images. The third path is anthropological: what makes art so necessary to human beings that they give it up so reluctantly, yet they can also feel so passionate about what it should *not* be? As a concrete human activity art is subject to the limitations and variations imposed on it by its

contingency – fashions, tastes, skills, materials, costs. At the same time, the artist creates in a manner evocative of divine creation: aesthetics has a spiritual value that the Church has recognized and, despite facing so much trouble, does not wish to give up.

Teaching and examination

Local teaching

Local teaching includes lectures and discussion seminars in Uppsala. Students are expected to prepare the assigned readings (found as pdfs on Moodle) and to participate in class discussions. They will also be asked from time to time to introduce a topic for discussion by contributing short oral presentations.

Half-distance teaching

Half-distance teaching is based on assigned readings and shorter written assignments for each teaching unit. Some lectures will be available on the interface. A discussion platform will be operative for exchange among students; interaction among participants is part of the course requirements.

Examination

As examination, students must write a short essay (7-8 pp.) about a topic of their choice agreed with the instructor. For example, they could choose a specific art-object and present it in its sacred context, problematizing its significance in the light of the historical, theological and anthropological lines of enquiry explored in the course.

The course is taught in English. The final paper can be written in English or Swedish.

Bibliography

Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image. An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, transl. by J.M. Todd (Chicago and London, 2000). [parts I-II]

Natalie Carnes, *Image and Presence: A Christological Reflection on Iconoclasm and Iconophilia* (Stanford, 2017).

Robin Margaret Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN, 2005).

Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei. The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (Princeton 1990, 2nd edn 2006).

Christoph Schönborn, *God's Human Face: the Christ-Icon* (San Francisco, 1994).

Reference Literature:

Ancient Authors

John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies against those who attack the divine images* (Crestwood, NY, 1997).

Theodore Abu Qurrah, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, transl. by Sidney H. Griffith (Leuven, 1997).

Theodore the Studite, *Writings on Iconoclasm*, transl. Thomas Cattoi (New York, 2015).

Modern Authors

Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: on the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton, NJ, 2002).

Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago 1994).

Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford, 2002).

John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London, 1997).

Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453, Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972) [several reprints; anthology of texts in English transl.]

M.-J. Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: the Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Economy*, transl. Rico Franses (Palo Alto, CA, 2004).

Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word. Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden, 1996).

Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia, PA, 2009).

Bissera Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon* (University Park, PA, 2010).

Linda Safran (ed.), *Heaven on Earth. Art and the Church in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 1998).

W. van Asselt *et al*. (eds), *Iconoclasm and Iconoclash: Struggle for Religious Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

Specific articles will be provided in addition as pdfs on Moodle.

See also "Kursplaner: allmänna bestämmelser" (Course plans: General rules)

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