Iconography and Trumau Schloss Byzantine Chapel

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INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE



Brother loan Gotia writing icons on the walls of the Byzantine Chapel in Schloss Trumau

Iconography and the Trumau Schloss Byzantine Chapel

From the beginning, Austria has been a cultural and religious cross-road between East and West; a place where different cultures and nations meet. You can see this "meeting" expressed in the art and worship throughout the country. For example, a *Pantocrator* similar to the one in our Byzantine Chapel can be found in Wieselburg, in the parish church of St. Ulrich, in Lower Austria, derived from an eleventh century fresco.

As a theological institute, responding to the call of Pope Saint John Paul II for a renewal of theology and marriage and family, we are bringing the tradition of the East alive. The treasures of Scripture, the Church Fathers, and the tradition of the iconographical schools throughout the ages are presented in a new way to the current and future generations in this Byzantine Chapel.

The Byzantine Chapel was restored between 2013 and 2015 with the help of private donors with special thanks to Allan and Radwan Riley, several foundations including the Dan Murphy Foundation, Aid to the Church in Need and the Foundation Future 21, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office to Aid the Church in Central and Eastern Europe and the sponsorship of the NÖ-Landesregierung.

An Interview with Brother Ioan Gotia

Brother Ioan Gotia, dcjm is the Schloss Trumau Byzantine Chapel iconographer and a graduate of the ITI.

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What is an icon?

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An icon is always a liturgical image that accompanies liturgy and liturgical prayer. Liturgical prayer takes place within a liturgical space, which is the chapel or the church. So, as the liturgy progresses, the images also accompany the prayer. That is why the place in which each image is located and depicted has a certain meaning.

Are there different styles in icon writing? How do the time and place make a difference?

I think the style itself of iconography is proper to each country and each school of iconography. Until the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the image

grapher

was always seen as a liturgical image, and it was seen this way in the East as well as in the West. In fact, there was a great unity of iconography between the West and the East. The iconographical murals were used and present in both geographical areas, and artists from both sides travelled to the other churches and countries.

There were times when one tradition was stronger, so it then influenced the other tradition more. For example, the Byzantine tradition was very strong in the sixth century because the Byzantine Empire was more widespread, and so it had the greater influence. Rome at the same time was a weaker political power, so the Byzantine influence was very much present in Italy. The Byzantines had their second capital in Ravenna, so Byzantine art spread in those centuries quite a bit and so did the mural. The more western tradition had a stronger influence later on during the Renaissance and Baroque periods from more or less the fifteenth to the seven-teenth centuries.

So I wouldn't really speak of different iconographical styles but rather a language. You have an image which directly accompanies the liturgy, and then there is an image which separates itself from liturgy and becomes more profane and more separated from the life of the church. For example, in the Renaissance period, the image had a religious subject looking more towards antiquity when the human person was idealized and was in the center of every representation. And so in the Renaissance, art was really praising humanity but in a way forgetting the creator.



Many achievements were achieved during the Renaissance and Baroque times, but they made a very categorical separation from liturgy. So the image became independent and it could then be represented in another environment. It was the same religious subject but did not necessarily invite you to pray. The purpose was a bit changed, and so also the style and the iconographical language changed.

For example, if we look in Western Europe from the tenth to the twelfth and thierteenth centuries, the image in the Romanesque style, which preceded the Gothic style, was still very, very connected to the liturgy. The language, the way of expressing or simplifying the representation of a saint or of a scene, was very proper to the liturgical art. It focused on what is really essential; namely sight. The eyes of the saint who contemplates the vision of God, and in doing so enters eternal life. Everything about the saint – his gestures, his vestments – everything had the purpose of directing the intention of the faithful towards God. Every gesture has a meaning. For example, a saint would point towards Christ or towards one New Testament scene. Also, the anatomy of the human body was very simplified. This was not because they didn't have enough knowledge about the human body, but it had more to do with focusing on the essential. The gestures and the face were simplified to put the stress of the accent on what is most important.

There developed two main schools in the Byzantine Church, the Russian and the Greek. So, the Slavs – Russians, Bulgarians, those from Slovakia – had received this tradition primarily from Greece, from the Byzantine Empire. While the Greek tradition predates the Russian school, the Russians or the Slavs have received this treasure and made it their own. So now when one looks at a Russian icon, one can recognize an image which was born of the Russian tradition, expressive of the people's faith, with all its particularities.

Also the colors are very different, very vivid. Since the Slavic part of the Byzantine world was poorer, less gold was used. This is why more murals were painted inside of the church, and sometimes also the outside of a smaller church, with very little gold used. But they were also luminous – the background could be either a very light ocher or a light blue. I wouldn't really speak of different iconographical styles but rather a language. You have an image which directly accompanies the liturgy, and then there is an image which separates itself from liturgy and becomes more profane and more separated from the life of the church.

Why is it said that an icon is "written" and not "painted"?

The word "iconography" comes from Greek – *icon* means image and *graphis* is writing; the writing of an image. But this term was interpreted by Theologians, so that the iconographer is the one who writes a holy image as one would copy the text of Holy Scripture in a manuscript. He is like a writing instrument. He himself is the pen with which the Holy Spirit writes. And what does he write? The Holy Spirit writes the image of God within men. So in some way the painting of an icon repeats – in some way, you have to understand – it repeats the moment of creation: when the Holy Spirit was sent by God to give life to the already formed earth, God the Father, through the Holy Spirit and the Son, molds the earth, creates man and breathes into him his breath, the breath of life. So in a way, every stage of preparation for writing an icon was considered a new creation.

As God's image was imprinted in men in creation, so too when we paint an icon, in some way we participate in this creative act of God. We are not creators, we just participate. To be the pen of God or the brush, in this case, doesn't mean taking a merely passive attitude, or that one simply allows himself to be an instrument. Rather, the iconographer is to be as Our Lady was – she was a very active instrument in God's hands. She said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." It was a very dynamic and very alive answer. She put all of her life into following God's word. She was an instrument, and didn't place any obstacle before God's will; she was really very active. So we as humans are very personal tools. Let us say we are not an inanimate object with which He can write. Instead, we are human beings and God wants us to cooperate with Him with our own will, with our talents. It is He, after all, who gave us these talents, these gifts.

Is there much talent needed to learn the art of icon writing?

I think, because this is a liturgical image and also an artistic expression, those who have received this gift – of being an artist – are especially called to write icons. But during the history of the Church there have been many iconographers who did not have very much formation. They had a gift of painting, they were artists, but they didn't have much formation. So I think, this gift is necessary and also the formation that comes with time and with the masters that one encounters.

Tell us more about your masters and teachers and who can write icons. I have received a gift of having very good teachers. One of them was my grandmother who studied painting. She didn't really get to paint much because the communist regime did not allow her to. She had to be a nurse. She painted pictures, but not icons. Women also paint icons; there are many nuns, for example, who do so. Because men and women religious are dedicated to prayer, it is natural that they would also dedicate themselves to this in this work.

But not only clergy or consecrated men and women are allowed to paint icons. Any man or woman who understands that this is a liturgical image may become an iconographer. When you paint, you pray in order to be a good instrument in the Holy Spirit's hand. There certainly are lay people who understand this and have learned the art, my grandmother, as I mentioned, and also my mother, who is also very talented. They have really encouraged me to be persevering and to work every day. I didn't always follow this advice but now I see that it is very important for an artist, and most especially for an icon writer, to work every day. Just as we eat every day and we pray every day, this work also nourishes the icon writer.

Later, I had two excellent teachers, one in high school and another one in the faculty, who taught me more about iconography. Then I was



taught for two years by Father Marco Ivan Rupnik, a Jesuit priest. He guided me in orienting my icon writing to create living icons: namely, not to just copy the murals which were proposed, but to create images which would speak to the people of our day, so, in a sense, to use contemporary language. And this is not always easy because one has to be open to seeing as others see.

Many have lost a sensibility towards sacred art. They don't under-

Every image immediately impacts the one who looks at it. This doesn't mean that an image should be so explicit as to say everything from the beginning. Because one needs to enter, to see, to contemplate it again and again. stand it any more. They have forgotten. And maybe they don't have a very active prayer life. So for them, the liturgical image can be a bit foreign. So that's why I think we should try to find contemporary means to address such people, as has been done in other centuries. I don't mean to propose a technical approach to the sacred, to liturgical art, in order to be more relevant. What I mean is to speak about human life and the human heart in order to speak to a human heart. Because Christ became incarnate He really shared our human life in everything, and transformed it from within. So we too, as Christians, are called to follow the same path – to transform the world of today from within, and also through liturgical images which are without. Every image immediately impacts the one who looks at it. This

doesn't mean that an image should be so explicit as to say everything from the beginning. Because one needs to enter, to see, to contemplate it again and again. Also, icons particularly should not be separated from one's prayer life because they are meant to accompany prayer. So if we have, for example, an icon in our own office where we work, it doesn't mean that we stop and pray and then work. It simply means that prayer also enters our work and transforms our work from within.

Do you pray during your work? Which texts/prayers do you meditate upon? Since these images come from a historical reality, from moments of Christ's life, for example, the Annunciation, it is very appropriate to meditate upon the respective liturgical text, or the biblical/scriptural text and then the liturgical rubrics. So I read the text before, and then I continue to write the icon. Yes, and I return to the Scriptures. As one icon could last for days or weeks, it depends on its complexity, one returns to the same text many times: at the beginning of the day, during the work, or when the iconographer takes a break. I also listen to liturgical chants when I work as they also help me to focus more on the work.

And I wanted to say something about the scriptural text which appears in an icon. We were saying that an image speaks more directly

Brother loan Gotia works on the cartoons of the icons



to a person, but there are also inscriptions present in an icon. Not just inscriptions which explain the name of the scene, for example the Nativity. But it is a scriptural text, as in the Presentation of Jesus in the temple. Here there could be a quotation from Scripture: "And a sword shall pierce your heart" from the prophecy of Simeon to Our Lady. In this way people would see the image and read the text together. Then during the liturgy one could say: "Ah, it's this text." And the biblical references also enter into the mind and heart of the person because one looks at it repeatedly. It then goes deeper. So it's important that the icon help people enter into Holy Scripture through the mystery represented as well as through the text.

Which liturgical chants do you listen to during your work?

I have different ones. Now, especially during the season of Lent, I have some liturgical chants for Lent. I have some friends from the ITI who have also given me Slavonic, Ukrainian or Slovak chants – so I don't listen only to Romanian liturgical chants but also to those in other languages.

Where else have you written icons for a chapel?

I completed the Sacred Theology Masters (STM) and Sacred Theology Licentiate (STL) studies at ITI in 2006, when the school was in Gaming, Austria. There I wrote icons for the ITI's first Byzantine Chapel. Then I went to Rome where I did iconography in a chapel there, and before this project I also went to Denver in the United States to write icons for a chapel there. There are also other places.

How does an iconographer have freedom of expression and how much does he have to stand back behind his work?

There are some books, for example the book of Dionysius of Fourna. This author has collected many written and unwritten canons of iconography in order to help the iconographer to follow these canons. What are these canons? They are essentially rules in order to safeguard the true faith, so that what is represented is according to the faith that

we profess. So they don't tell us very much about how to realize the icon in an artistic way, but what should be represented and where. So, for example, with Christ the *Pantocrator*: He raises His hand in blessing in such an order and in such a way; and He holds the book open or closed; and if it is open, it has a particular text.

The indications from these books are very concise and very brief. So this gives a great freedom to the icon writer. Normally, an iconographer does not just come up with something new, but learns from the great masters who have created before him. By looking and trying to understand what the masters have written, he tries to express the same truth. That is why iconographic styles are so many. They are acAn iconographer does not just come up with something new, but learns from the great masters who have created before him. By looking and trying to understand what the masters have written, he tries to express the same truth.

cording to the country or region in which they were created. They reflect local particularities and the iconographer's traditions. Also the colors used are particular to the place in which they were created. Nowadays we have much more freedom to use many types of colors. But before, the icon writers made the paints themselves. I also try to make them. They made them from natural materials – from earth, different kinds of minerals, rocks; some were burned to a greater or lesser degree and that changed the color. Colors were also taken from plants. Icons are sometimes also on the outside of a building, especially in the fresco technique and they are able to stand up against rain or other inclement weather.

A Short History of the Renovations in the Trumau Schloss for the Byzantine Chapel

The first phase of the Trumau Byzantine Chapel project at the ITI was completed in 2012. Our architect, Peter Mensdorff, donated the first plans and our students did almost all of the work of this phase. They cleared the space, removed the unneeded walls to reveal the original arches and helped a local firm to level the dirt floor.





Next, in 2013, the base concrete floor was completed and walls were added to delineate the chapel space and to create the sacristy and utility rooms. In September 2013, the preparation work began for the ceiling iconography. The ceiling was plastered with careful precision to define the lines

of the original arches. During the drying period for the plaster, we installed the floor heating, electricity and plumbing. After the first coating of plaster dried out, we then applied the second plastering coat to the ceilings and sanded it by hand, as this coating serves as the base coat for the iconography. While the ceiling preparation was in process, we hired two iconographers, Brother Ioan Gotia, dcjm, from Romania, and Father Tomas Labanic, from Slovakia, to begin their artistic work. Both are graduates of the ITI. Father Labanic will work from home and do iconography on panels for the walls of the chapel.

Brother Gotia first made sketches from home for the iconographic work he did on the ceiling. He then brought those sketches to the ITI in January 2014 and wrote the ceiling icons over a period of six months from January to June 2014.



Chapel icons work-in-progress April 2014

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Descriptions of the Ceiling Iconography

Brother Ioan Gotia, dcjm, arrived at the ITI in January 2014 and spent six months writing the sacred icons on the ceiling. Here is his description of the icons and their place in the chapel.

An icon is always a liturgical image that accompanies liturgy and liturgical prayer. Liturgical prayer takes place within a liturgical space, which is the chapel or the church. So, as the liturgy progresses, the images also accompany the prayer. That is why the place in which each image is located and depicted has a meaning.

Pantocrator and Evangelists

For example: In the Byzantine Chapel here in Trumau, the center, the focus, of the whole iconographical design is Christ the Almighty, *Pantocrator*, Who sustains everything with His providence, with His power. He is surrounded by the four living beings. We know about them in the apocalypse and the visions of Ezechiel and Isaiah and they also prefigure and symbolize the four



evangelists. So this depiction is in the center. It should be in the dome of the chapel, or of the church – the highest point.

Virgin of the Sign

Then there is the representation of Our Lady, the Virgin of the Sign, which accompanies the prayer from the apses of the altar, the presbytery. She is the Virgin of the Sign, namely, she of whom Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 7:14), "a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" So



she is represented in the attitude of prayer with her hands uplifted. And Immanuel is represented not in her womb but surrounded by a glorious "*Mandorla*." This sphere knowingly indicates: He is the One about Whom the prophecy is concerned.

So around these two representations of Christ the Almighty and of Our Lady, we place all the other images. The other images can vary, and their place can also vary. But these two are the main ones and the stable ones which give structure to the rest. This is the case for all Byzantine chapels and was also the case for the whole Church in the west – Roman Catholics included.

In the Byzantine Chapel here in Trumau, we have made a selection of images to help the faithful to realize that as he enters the chapel, it is through liturgies – through prayer – that he enters Christ's life and Christ's life becomes contemporary to him.

Icons and the Mystery of Salvation

So the person taking part in the liturgy is present at the Annunciation, and he is present at the Nativity of Christ. Liturgy makes it possible that what happened 2000 years ago is now present. Or said in a better way, we are present at that event which took place once for all and changed the history of salvation. So, as we enter the chapel and pray during the liturgy, we are made present to the mystery of salvation.

Ceiling icons in the ITI Byzantine Chapel

For the ceiling in this chapel, we have made a selection of seven out of the twelve main liturgical feasts of the Byzantine liturgical year.

Beginning from the sides of the presbytery we have placed the scenes from the infancy of Christ. There we have the nativity, and then the presentation in the temple, and as you go around the chapel you see other major moments of Christ's life.





Annunciation

The Annunciation is really the entrance of the chapel, because through the Annunciation, we enter the kingdom of heaven. This is because God, by becoming true man, opens to us the gates of heaven. This is why the Annunciation is represented at the entrance. It is above the two main pillars.

Nativity and Presentation

The Nativity and the Presentation in the Temple flank the entry into the presbytery. So at the left side you have the Nativity, and the right side depicts the Presentation.

East and West Symbolism through the Baptism of Christ, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection

On the western wall, (as one turns his face towards the entrance of the chapel) you see the scene of the Baptism of Christ on the left side and on the right you see the Crucifixion. Further, as you turn to the right, you see the Resurrection or the Descent of Christ into Sheol in order to free Adam and Eve. Why have these scenes in those places? This is because the western part, as opposed to the eastern one, is the place where the sun goes down, and so it symbolizes the place of passing from death to life.



The Crucifixion, Dormition, and Last Judgment

This symbolism of the passing from death to life is also why the Crucifixion of Our Lord is normally represented on the western side, as well as the Dormition or Assumption of Our Lady into heaven and the Last Judgment. So, on the western wall we are encouraged to look from west to the east. On the West we pass through death, that is we go far away from life, we go through death, but we face east, the light. So we enter new life – the eternal life. Through baptism we already enter eternal life and the Resurrection is a manifestation of Christ's victory over death.

Transfiguration

Then there is another scene rich in symbolism: the Transfiguration. The Transfiguration as we face the altar, the presbytery, is depicted on the right side of the chapel. It is the moment of Christ's revelation of the vision of his glory before his passion.



Seraphim and Cherubim

Then there is another representation: the Cherubim and Seraphim who surround the throne of Christ, the Almighty. They are represented on the



arches which surround the two main columns of the chapel. So they really sustain, in a way, the throne of Christ the Almighty. They have six wings, because they hide their face, their hands and feet. By this, they indicate that they are manifesting the mystery of God's presence. So before God's presence we cannot enter blandly but we must realize that we face a mystery. So we have to take off our sandals as Moses did, or as did the cherubs, to lay aside everything which hinders us from drawing close.

Dedication - Exaltation of the Holy Cross

The Chapel will have a double dedication: The first is the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and the second one is the martyrs of the twentieth century. Why these two dedications? The first one, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, because it is a feast within the school year of the ITI, so it can be celebrated by the whole community. Since the chapel is here for the whole community, it is important not to have a feast which falls during the time when no one is here.

Dedication - Martyrs of the Twentieth Century - Future phase

The chapel is also dedicated to the martyrs of the twentieth century in order to honor them and especially the most recent martyrs, who were recently recognized by the Church and beatified and canonized. So there will be saints from the Eastern Churches and maybe also from the Western Church – so there will be a representation from the whole Catholic Church with its Byzantine and Latin lungs.



Students, Stones and the Gifts of G

There is a light burning in an unrenovated room of the Schloss. Students trickle in and out at all hours of the day and night. Some come to look and they stay to work. They stay for hours discussing their studies, talking and singing. But what are they doing?

It started as a joke and a dream. Father Juraj Terek, the Byzantine Chaplain at the ITI, was surveying the ugly concrete floor of the Byzantine Chapel in the Schloss and trying out different types of stone tiles. A student from Slovakia, Ondrej Vlcek, was with him. Ondrej said, "What about doing a mosaic floor?" Father Juraj quipped in return, "and who will do it? You?" "Yes, I can," was Ondrej's response.

It has always been like that at the ITI. When there is a need at the ITI, a student will emerge who has a gift, a talent to supply that need. One has a gift for decorating, another for choir music, another for recording sound or taking photos, another for gardening, and yet another for organizing. Most of the work on campus is done by students. For the



tion in the Byzantine Chapel.

Byzantine Chapel renovations, students knocked down the walls to reveal the original arches for the space. All the iconography in the chapel has been done by ITI alumni, so it is fitting that the floor has the same quality.

Ondrej was trained in mosaics by a priest in Slovakia who had studied under Reverend Mark Rupnik, SJ. The technique the students are using was practiced in Ravenna. Ondrej spent the summer of 2014 getting donations of stone for the project - stone which is as international as the ITI. stone which is in different colors and from places like China, Italy, and Brazil. Ondrej was excited when he spoke about the stone from Cappadocia (today's Turkey). "The same Church Fathers that we study at the ITI could have looked or stepped on this stone!" As the Church Fathers are a foundation in the Faith for us, so these stones from Cappadocia will be a founda-

Father Juraj and Ondrej discussed and planned a design that would unite the artwork with the life of the ITI - a life of academics and prayer.

The design takes into account the fact that the Byzantine Chapel will be dedicated to the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Now students, under Ondrej's direction, have worked to put each stone in its place to build the floor. "The mosaic floor represents the ITI." said Father Juraj. "It represents the students, faculty, and all those whose work, prayer and gifts come together to make the ITI as a whole. Each person who comes to the ITI gives of himself, as God calls him, and all our gifts together make the ITI



what it is. It is like seeing a picture of God's grace in action." 🔀

Future Phases

The Byzantine Chapel is currently being used to benefit the ITI for its daily liturgies, for visiting dignitaries and for the local Trumau community. Bishops from Central and Eastern Europe often visit the ITI on their way to Rome. It is wonderful to finally have a fitting space for them to celebrate Divine Liturgy.

This chapel is not yet finished. It is currently a workin-progress as there are more icons that need to be written. We still need to finish the sanctuary which is the holy of



holies and the place of the altar. We also need to build the iconostasis which separates the nave from the sanctuary. Then there are the walls on which will be placed icons of the martyrs of the twentieth century.

As our Grand Chancellor Christoph Cardinal Schönborn says, "The chapel is a classroom about the sacred space." Some students will learn about the sacred space and about liturgy, and will come closer to God. But it is a good thing that there is still work to do on the chapel. For, as our Grand Chancellor Christoph Cardinal Schönborn says, "The chapel is a classroom about the sacred space." Some students will learn about the sacred space and about liturgy, and will come closer to God. And some, who are artistic, will learn from this space, and actually will be able to help to complete it. Then they will have learned and be inspired to do similar artwork in other places. Thus the students will become the teachers of the sacred spaces.

You too can be part of this process of building the Byzantine Chapel. Your donation will be put towards student financial aid (each year we need to raise $\notin 1.9$ million in financial aid). To donate, visit *www.iti.ac.at* and the giving pages. You can also see photos on this

page: *http://www.iti.ac.at/news-events/photo*. Then, each day during the Divine Liturgy, as the priest walks on the mosaic floor and stands amidst the icons, bringing the gifts to the altar during the Great Entrance, you

too will be remembered in these words:

"May the Lord God remember in His Kingdom... the noble and evermemorable founders and benefactors of this holy Church and all you Christians of the true faith, always, now and ever, and forever. Amen."

Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to the many founders and benefactors of this Byzantine Chapel who are remembered daily in prayer here at the International Theological Institute. We wish to say a special thank you to Allan and Radwan Riley for making this chapel possible.

Work is in progress for the finishing of the floor, the apsis and sanctuary, the altar, and the iconostasis. If you wish to support this project, here are the banking details. All donations are tax-exempt according to the law in the respective countries:

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