the Bloomsbury Fabians, with their need to create a "new hieroglyphics" for Shakespeare, called themselves the "new invisible college."

The same methodology, revamped with Marxist terminology, is the basis of efforts by modern, politically correct university instructors to "deconstruct" Shakespeare—efforts which Taylor would applaud as "skeptical . . . suspicious" criticism. For these modern theorists, even Shakespeare's words are untrustworthy (bourgeois overreliance on words for rational discourse is called "logocentrism"), and must be analyzed as mere signposts for class oppression, racism, and phallocentrism. Here is the belief structure behind the current campaign on many campuses to end the student requirement to read "DEMs" ("Dead European Males") like Homer, Chaucer, and Shakespeare. *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* are politically incorrect, and can be omitted, because they include stereotypic treatment of Jews and black-skinned people. The fraud in this, of course, is that if the principles of justice and leadership which Shakespeare intended in those plays were understood and universally applied today, then there would be no anti-Semitism, nor no genocide of darker-skinned peoples by the usurious International Monetary Fund.

Is Shakespeare, then, to be taught "translated" into modern English, or reduced to data that only confirm the student or instructor's prejudice? Or, are students to be challenged to recreate the principles by which Shakespeare sought to freely communicate the concepts of love, justice, and leadership which make up the subject of his plays? All Renaissance thinkers, including Shakespeare, understood that language is not merely a plenum of usage; it lives and grows with the nation-state for which it is unifying factor. As a nation crumbles, so too its language. As Western civilization fell into the Dark Ages, and the majority of the population became illiterate peasants, local languages disappeared, replaced by a few hundred words of slang vocabulary—nothing more was needed to grunt one's way through a short, brutal existence. When Europe began to restart technological and social progress, especially after 800 A.D., languages had to be completely rebuilt, borrowing heavily from Latin, which was kept artificially alive in the monasteries. This was commonly understood as late as 1847, when James Fenimore Cooper warned that the increasing use of slang by America's newspapers threatened to overwhelm literate language, and was becoming "the great and most powerful foe of justice" in the United States.

Today, English dies by inches each day. Rather than reverse the process, we make a virtue out of horrible necessity, as in the case of "black English," where a deformed and shrunken usage brought about by centuries of racist policies is blessed with academic legitimacy. If we believe, as a nation, that the most potent concept we expect our students to ever communicate is, "You like fries with that?" then we need not teach Shakespeare.

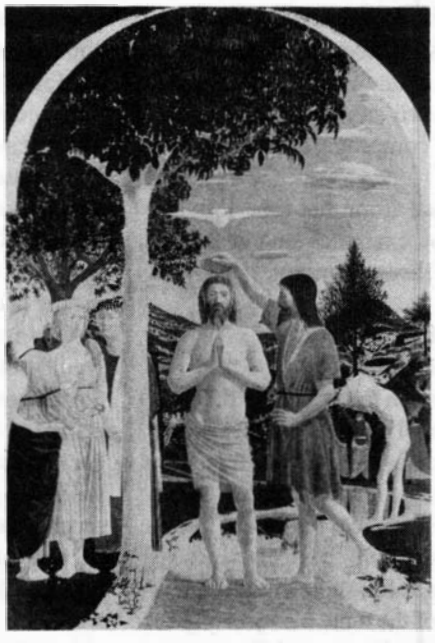
Sacred art: What the West owes the East

by Nora Hamerman and Warren A.J. Hamerman

Transfiguration: Introduction to the Contemplation of Icons
by Maria Giovanna Muzj (translated by Kenneth D. Whitehead)
St. Paul Books and Media, Boston, 1991
179 pages, illus., hardbound, $19.95

The issue of religious imagery is one of the most heatedly debated in the history of Christianity, and indeed of all the "religions of the Book," which include also Judaism and Islam, both of which rejected all representation of the human form in worship as idolatrous. This revolt was to erupt again in the Iconoclastic Controversy which swept through the Byzantine Empire in the 8th century, and in radical Protestantism in 16th-century Western Europe. Yet, the highest achievements of Western art grew directly or indirectly out of the "icon," the notion of a sacred picture which is not to be worshipped in itself, but instead, is intended to provoke a contemplation of the invisible universe through the medium of the visible.

It seems that it was in Constantinople, seat of the Eastern Roman Empire and the Orthodox Church, that the earliest canons of Christian art were developed, establishing whole classes of images called "icons." This little book by Maria Muzj, who teaches at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, reproduces and explores 32 of the most important surviving examples of icons, each representing a type of image. The series begins with images of Christ, God in human form, variously shown as the Almighty (Pantocrator), the Savior (Soter), the Master and Judge, and so forth; the Virgin Mary and Child, also in a series of set forms of which the "Virgin of Tenderness" is repeated over and over again in Greek, Italo-Byzantine, and Russian and Polish icons; the *Deësis,* or prayer, which consisted of the image of Christ seated on his throne with his Mother on his right and St. John the Baptist on his left, both in an attitude of supplication, which became an integral part of church architecture from the 7th century onward. Finally, Muzj introduces the major narrative themes of the New Testament and related stories, such as the Annunciation, Nativity, Baptism of Christ,



Rubleyev's "Old Testament Trinity," the three angels who visited Abraham. Painted around 1420 by Russia's greatest icon artist, this may resemble panels that traveled to the Council of Florence with the delegation led by Isidor of Kiev.

Piero della Francesca, "Baptism of Christ," ca. 1442. This altarpiece painted shortly after the Council of Florence shows the direct influence of the Byzantine icons of the "Old Testament Trinity," translated into the language of the scientific Renaissance. The inclusion of three identical angels is totally unusual.

Transfiguration, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, Pentecost, and others.

Much can be learned from Muzj's approach, as she shows a deep understanding of how each form was woven into the contemplation of a central tenet of the faith. This certainly gives a better grasp of this unfamiliar art than merely formal analysis, and also helps to understand the background of the greatest Western artists, who came later.

For example, she relates that the Last Supper theme had two distinct traditions in art, the one "more common in the West, which depicted the apostles gathered around Jesus, pondering with intense emotion the tragic announcement of the betrayal." The second, preferred by Byzantine art, illustrated "the liturgical-sacramental act of the communion of the apostles." From her description it becomes clear that Leonardo da Vinci's immortal painting of the Last Supper combined *both* the Eastern and Western traditions in a single painting, which is simultaneously "narrative" and "sacramental." Thus, her discussion of the iconographic background deepens our appreciation for a Western work of art, as well as introducing an Eastern one we might not have known.

It is even possible, since the exemplar she reproduces comes from the 15th-century Russian school of Novgorod (now in the Kiev museum), that Leonardo might have seen similar icons in Florence. The delegation of 100 persons from Kiev that came to the Council of Florence in 1439-42 certainly brought such icons with them and may have left some behind.

Imperial Byzantine icons

Miss Muzj is quite open about the degree to which the imperial Byzantine court, which was, after all, the continuation of the Roman Empire with an overlay of Oriental despotism, influenced the form of these pictures, so that Christ was endowed with many of the traits of the autocratic emperor, and the Virgin Mary, the empress. The "classical" icons of Constantinople were distant and regal, and very unnaturalistic. Gold lines in the garments, remote derivations from the naturalistic highlights on draperies depicted by ancient Greek painters, are deliberately "not subordinate to any source of light." When these images were replicated in Italy, in the artistic revival of the 13th century, they became more human and natural, less "hieratic and spiritualized."

For similar reasons, the Byzantine artists deliberately rejected artificial perspective, the science of reproducing the illusion of three-dimensional space on the plane through applying what we would call projective geometry. This science may have been known to the ancient Greeks, but was famously rediscovered in the 15th-century Renaissance in Italy. The Christ Child in Byzantine icons is a miniature man, Who never was a human baby; He sometimes appears in a medallion within the body of the Virgin. All of these formal features, in Miss Muzj's view, make the icons more spiritual, but she does not elaborate on the fact that they have a political dimension, which exalts a society in which individual freedom here on earth is extremely limited.

Beginning with Giotto around 1300, and flowering in the 15th-century Renaissance, Italian artists translated the familiar icons into a more human form. They brought the deity closer to man and thus brought man closer to the deity. This exemplified the staunch Western belief in the *Filioque*, the clarifying phrase which was recited in the Latin Creed from the 9th century forward, and which emphasized the role of man in the ongoing work of God's creation by underlining

the co-equal role of Christ in the procession of the Holy Spirit. For long centuries this Western doctrine of the Trinity was a bone of contention between Rome and Byzantium, and it was only in 1439 at the Council of Florence, that the Byzantine hierarchy accepted a compromise ratifying the *Filioque* formulation.

Western art of the Renaissance from that time forward frequently returned to Byzantine examples and reshaped them from the standpoint of the *Filioque* concept.

The 'Old Testament Trinity'

For example, the last illustration in Muzj's book is the most beautiful of all surviving Russian icons, the "Old Testament Trinity" by Rubleyev, an panel dated to 1422 showing the three angels who visited Abraham, a popular theme in Byzantine art. Similar panels must have circulated at the Council of Florence. Piero della Francesca, the great Florentine-trained artist and master of scientific perspective, who was working in Florence at the time of the council, just a few years later incorporated the motif of the three identical angels into the scene of his altarpiece of the Baptism of Christ—an unheard-of combination. Piero's painting was closely associated historically with the leading personalities of the council, and it would appear that Piero was demonstrating to the Byzantines how their culture could be improved by translating its traditional themes into a new visual language which applied the notions of perspective and proportion.

Piero's three angels, unlike Rubleyev's, which float in a flattened space, have an undeniable material architecture: They stand on legs which are as solid as the columns in a Brunelleschi church, and were probably inspired by them. Muzj says that Rubleyev's icon, which has always been revered in Russia, is fully spiritual and fully human at the same time, but we would say that Piero goes beyond the Russian master in making the human side concrete without ever losing the spiritual dimension. Unfortunately, we suspect Muzj would not agree.

This is not a minor side issue. Today, in the ecumenical efforts to bring the Eastern and Western Christian churches back together, there are many in the West who are quite willing to give up the *Filioque* which was precisely the Western resistance to an oligarchic form of state and to technological stagnation, and the celebration of the human individual's "divine spark" of potential creativity. Were this to occur, it would be a disaster for the whole world, because it would vitiate the thrust of the church's social teachings to bring development to all mankind as the basis for peace. It would be a bitter blow indeed to the resistance fighters of Eastern Europe, many of whom waged their fight as Christians above all.