Article

How Love for the Image Cast out Fear of It in Early Christianity

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Abstract: Iconoclastic and iconophilic impulses have long vied for pre-eminence in Christianity, coming to one particularly fraught crisis point in the Byzantine Iconomachy of the eighth and ninth centuries. Funding both impulses, this paper argues, is a profound Platonic ambivalence about the image. For Plato, the image not only deceives and enslaves; it also reveals and inspires. Plotinus, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, John of Damascus, and Theodore of Stoudios articulate their own iterations of Plato's hopes and fears about the image as they attempt different strategies for resolving these dueling inclinations. This paper traces the evolution of image theory across these thinkers to illumine how Theodore of Stoudios' approach magnifies Platonic image hopes and quells fears in a way that prepares for the ongoing resolution of image anxiety in the iconographic tradition. More than a purely historical interest, this arc of image thought have continuing relevance for image theory today.

Keywords: image; icon; iconoclasm; Plato; Platonism; Theodore of Stoudios

1. Introduction

Alain Besançon begins his 2500-year intellectual history of the image with Plato. Plato is not the first to write about images, as Besançon acknowledges. Refrains sounding hopes and fears for the image swell long before him. But it is Plato, Besançon argues, who arranges the mature form of these leitmotifs, the form in which they recur throughout the Western tradition. "Plato", Besançon announces, "is the father of both iconophilia and iconoclasm" ([1], p. 36). I make a much more modest version of his argument: that it is Plato, together with Israel's scriptures, whose ambivalence about the image haunts early Christianity. Christianity for years can neither relinquish its Platonic hopes for the image nor assuage its Platonic anxieties. These desires and fears come to a head in the Iconomachy of Byzantium, as some Christian theologians—notably Theodore of Stoudios—find a way to mollify Platonic criticism and affirm the use of the image in worship.

This essay is not a story about the textual transmission and reception of Plato's writings on images. It attempts neither to recreate textual lineages, nor generate theories of how early Christians read Plato. It traces no debate about early Christian interpretive traditions around discrete passages, nor does it note how particular sections in Plato were appropriated or resisted. This is a different sort of essay, its subject broader and more diffuse. It traces the homologies and transformations in image logic by highlighting the different iterations of Platonic hopes and anxieties for the image found in the early Christians steeped in Platonic thought.

Worrying that images confuse appearance with reality, Plato at the same time conveys a hope that they might yet draw the beholder nearer to the divine. I sketch various forms these concerns take in a few representative writers in early Christianity. Beginning with Plato, I fly quickly through Plotinus, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, John of Damascus, and finally arrive in the thought of Theodore of

Stoudios, who helps soothe image anxieties so that image hopes can flourish. Then in a brief conclusion, I gesture to the ongoing resolution of Platonic image anxieties in the practices of iconography still thriving in Orthodox churches. Yet all this is more, I suggest, than a historical tour. This early Christian path through image hopes and fears may help us to blaze trails beyond the image anxieties of our own time.

2. Plato: The Wedge between Appearance and Reality

Plato's corpus is rife with reflections on images. One could find an interesting insight into imaging in almost any of his dialogues. But I begin identifying Plato's formulation of image anxiety with the text in which he most famously espouses it, *The Republic*. When he bans the poets from his ideal city, Plato communicates two levels of anxiety about images: the incidental and the intrinsic. He formulates the first worry earlier in *The Republic* when Socrates discusses the education of future guardians of the city.

In Book II of the Republic, Plato finds his way to his argument about images through a discussion of stories. Stories, Socrates points out, are crucial to the education of children. Malleable and impressionable, children respond powerfully to narratives, even more so than they do to other modes of pedagogy. Their tender souls readily absorb stories and the beliefs they embody, and so educators, Socrates argues, must be careful to communicate only fine and beautiful stories ([2], 377a–d, pp. 52–53). If caregivers wish to prevent what is mean and false from seeping into the souls of children, then other stories must go, including cherished ones of Homer and Hesiod.

In his efforts to convince Glaucon and Adeimantus to censor stories for young children, Socrates draws images into the discussion to specify the conditions for rejecting a story: "[w]hen a story gives a bad image (εἰκάζω) of what the gods and heroes are like, the way a painter does whose picture is not at all like the things he's trying to paint" ([2], 377e, p. 53). So in this discussion of stories for the young, Socrates voices his first anxiety about images: those that "image badly" malform the young in ways that are difficult to reverse later in life ([2], 378c–e, p. 54). Stories about gods warring, fighting, or scheming create an image of the gods that is bad because it is both false and nefarious, and so, according to Socrates' argument, these harmful images have no place in the ideal city. Only those stories that present the gods as they "really are"—good and the cause of good—should be passed down.

Socrates' criticism of images in Book II is incidental because it pertains, not to images as a genre, but to particular types of images. He does not make an argument at this point for banning images; he makes an argument for censoring them. The argument, moreover, performs a kind of respect for images, for Socrates treats them as pedagogically powerful. True, some images—perhaps even many images—ought to be eliminated from the ideal city. But the argument for censorship turns on a backhanded compliment to images. What else could enter the very soul of a child?

If this were the only objection to images in *The Republic*, one could imagine an easy defense for many sacred images, particularly those that present the gods as true and good. But the case against images grows stronger toward the end of the *Republic*. In Book X, it becomes clear that the argument for censoring stories amounts to an entirely different basis for the educational system. The incidental critique of images in poetry demonstrates not just that some poems and some images are problematic. It indicates that poetry is unfit to be the cornerstone of education. How can poetry be entrusted with that role when it can potentially corrupt the young? Poetry can only be trusted when it is tethered to and judged by philosophy; thus philosophy, not poetry, must serve as the basis of education. And so this builds toward the stronger form of his critique against poetry: There is something about philosophy as philosophy that is trustworthy, while poetry as poetry is not. Poetry is not fully credible, it turns out, precisely because it is a type of image.

Plato's deep problem with poetry is that, as an image, it is imitative. In Book X of the *Republic*, Socrates voices Plato's famous anxiety about imitation (*mimesis*). Returning to the subject of poetry many books after his point about educating the young, Socrates intensifies his argument for censoring

particular poems to one for banning all images. Because poetry is imitative, Socrates argues, it "should be altogether excluded" ([2], p. 265, 595b). Socrates elaborates the problem with imitation with his famous example of three beds: the form of the bed, in which the quality of "bed-ness" inheres; a particular bed, which we can both see and use; and the painting of bed, which we can see but not use. The gods make the form; carpenters particular beds; and painters the pictures of them. The truth of the bed's bedness resides in its form, and the carpenter, to make a bed, acquires knowledge of that form. The painter, however, looks to a particular bed (an appearance of the form), so she has no need of knowing the bed in itself (the form of the bed). To make a painting, an artist need not know how a bed holds together or what makes it work as a bed. She needs to know only what the bed looks like, for she projects the appearance of a bed, not the bed itself. Such imitation is at a third remove from truth ([2], 597a–e, 598a, pp. 266–68).

Over the course of Book X, Socrates elaborates this argument about how images are at a third remove of truth with another example: the flute-maker, the flute-player and the painter of flutes. This example is important because it helps him illustrate the tenuous relationship to truth that images have. The flute-player has real knowledge about whether the flute is made well; the maker has right opinions, informed by the player; and the imitator has neither knowledge nor right opinions ([2], 602a–3, pp. 272–73). Without real knowledge, nor even grounded opinions, the painter has only the realm of appearance. She is like a trickster, a theme illustrated in the ignorant buffoonery of the rhapsode Ion in the dialogue of the same name ([2], 602c–d, p. 273).

In his strongest cases against them, Plato articulates images within a mimetic logic in which they are simply inferior visual copies of what they image. This is the problem with all human-made images for Plato: their relationship to truth is distanced. They are rooted in the realm of appearance and opinion, with a dubious relationship to the realm of being and truth. Truth thus becomes accidental to what an image is and does, which is why images must be shackled to the logos as poetry must be to philosophy. This speaks to the inferiority of images, but it does not explain why image-makers must be banned. The problem that justifies their banning, for Plato, is not just that images *can* lie; the problem is that to be an image *is* to lie.

Images are not pernicious for existing at a third remove from truth but for obscuring their distance from truth. The profound problem with images is that to succeed as images, they both exist at a distance from truth and mask that distance. Such masking renders images intrinsically distorted and distorting. Socrates voices this concern to Glaucon in conspiratorial tones: "Between ourselves—for *you* won't denounce me to the tragic poets or any of the other imitative ones—all such poetry is likely to distort the thought of anyone who hears it, unless he has the knowledge of what it is really like, as a drug to counteract it" ([2], 595b, p. 265). The language is strong: poetic images put the beholder under a spell that drugs must counteract, and Socrates claims to have witnessed that deceptive spell at work. He hears people say, so he reports, that poets know all crafts, all about the gods, all about virtue ([2], 598d–e, p. 269). Socrates' is not an abstract concern: People are deceived by poetry into mistaking it for truth. In fact, if people did not mistake images for truth, the images are likely not very good images after all.

This critique of images as deceptive is devastating, but Plato's problems with the image do not stop there. It is not just *that* images deceive but *the way* they deceive: by appealing to the lower parts of the soul. Poetry and imitations do not convince us that they are what they project by appealing to our reason. Nor do they encourage us to deliberate quietly. They excite us; they "gratify the irrational part" of our soul ([2], 605c, p. 276). They pull off their trickery by nourishing our baser aspects. An image succeeds as an image by appealing to passions rather than reason, making us worse people, according to Plato's anthropology, simply by receiving them. This appeal to passion is intrinsic to what an image is, and it becomes particularly sinister when particular images themselves reinforce that quality—for example, when Homer's heroes make theatrical shows of grief and lament, causing spectators to praise and identify with the hero ([2], 605c–d, p. 276). Such images drive deeper the wedge between reason

and emotion, knowledge and opinion, being and appearance. They suggest suspicious associations between images and vice.

The incidental and intrinsic critiques of images are complexly interwoven in Plato's *Republic*. The intrinsic critique claims that images themselves are at a third remove from truth, and they fail to represent that distance. Instead, they pull of their "trick" of imaging by playing on the baser parts of our soul to elide the realm of being with the realm of becoming. Thus, they are false and nurture a viciousness in the soul—a tendency that is augmented when the images represent the gods or heroes acting in overly-emotional, depraved ways. The incidental critique focuses on how some images compound this association with falseness and viciousness. The incidental in this way redounds to the intrinsic, for bad images really, for Plato, exemplify what all images *qua* images are: passion-inducing, deceptive, and false. If *The Republic* were Plato's only word about images, the Platonic outlook for images would be grave, indeed.

But Plato gives readers a much more hopeful outlook on images elsewhere in his corpus—particularly in the *Timaeus*, Plato's dialogue that most captivated early Christian theologians. In that beloved text, Plato describes the relationship between the forms and the sensible world as one of imaging. The sensible images the intelligible, the temporal images the eternal. In fact, he tells the story of the demiurge fashioning the universe as that of a divine artisan crafting an image. He concludes the dialogue, "The world has received animals, mortal and immortal, and is fulfilled with them, and has become a visible animal containing the visible—the sensible God who is the image of the intellectual, the great, best, fairest, most perfect—the only begotten heaven" ([3], 92c, p. 1211). The world itself is a kind of image just as the human is an image of the cosmos. As the human has a soul, so too, does the world have a soul. The Christian tradition made much of Plato's description of the world-soul in the shape of a chi-rho ([3], 36b–c, p. 1166), which typified for many in the tradition the way the universe images Christ.

When the demiurge crafts the universe as an image of the world of forms, he shows us what a good image can do: it can in some way give to us what it images. Contemplation of the temporal realm can lead to contemplation of the eternal one, the sensible the intelligible. The two are bound together through the structure of the image. This is a rather stark contrast from the human-made images of the *Republic*, which Plato describes primarily in terms of the sundering and confusing of these two realms. Where the human-made images of the *Republic* are dangerous because they operate by a slide between these two realms—representing the realm of being in the realm of becoming—the god-made image in the *Timaeus* is full of possibility because of that same slide. For in contemplating the divine harmonies in the universe, a person becomes more like those harmonies—more immortal, more god-like. The shadows of deception that threaten human-made images do not in the same way menace these god-made ones. The image of the universe is not just a good image that gives to us the imaged; in giving to us the imaged, it makes us better and more like the imaged. The effects are almost the opposite of those described earlier of human-made images.

The way these images can inspire the soul to ascend, to become better and purer, is made more explicit in Plato's *Symposium*. Plato's figure of Diotima famously describes a ladder of ascent that figures a movement from sensible to intelligible—a way of responding to the world as the image the divine craftsman made it to be. The ascender begins with one beautiful body, then produces beautiful discourses about that body, then loves the beauty of all bodies, then souls, laws, knowledge, and finally, Beauty itself ([4], 210a–c, pp. 47–48). At the point the ascender has given up what Diotima calls the slavish small-mindedness of giving himself over to particular instances of beauty, and instead regards the beauty that neither changes nor diminishes, he can give birth to true virtue ([4], 210e–212a, pp. 48–50). Here again images act like they should for Plato, mediating ascent from the material to the intelligible, from becoming to being. Once more, though, these are not images made by human hands; they are, as the Christian tradition emphasizes, acheiropoietic. And even with these images, ascent can go awry. Beautiful Alcibiades shows up shortly after Diotima's speech, rhapsodizing about Socrates' beautiful mind but loving him as if he is a beautiful body ([4], 212d, p. 50).

Here is an example of how a good image can generate a problematic response for Plato: by inspiring a love directed at its materiality rather than its prototype.

Even if acheiropoietic images can go awry, though, they at least have an important role to play for Plato: they lead us to the divine and also make us more like the divine. They inspire the *eros* that propels us into divine life. There is ample justification here for acheiropoietic images. But what of human-made images? Can they, too, participate in this movement of stimulating love for the intelligible through the sensible? The *Phaedrus* is an interesting text on that point for it deals with the question of the alignment of form and content and also the love of form and love of content. Phaedrus loves beautiful speeches. He loves them regardless of what they argue for, regardless of their relationship to knowledge. Socrates tries to enter into Phaedrus' love to heal it, so that his love for the beautiful speech opens, as loves for the sensible should, onto the greater love for the beauty of knowledge. What is interesting here is that Plato is tapping into the same power of the word that worried him about poetry in *The Republic*. But in this dialogue, Socrates uses the power of poetic images in the hopes of rehabilitating a soul that loves words wrongly, a soul, like Phaedrus', that loves the sensuality of words more than their veracity. So Socrates offers a good speech to try to heal him, as if a good image might rehabilitate an idolater. Remarkably, it does. Phaedrus, by the end, seems to have been persuaded and healed by Socrates' rhetorical images.

The *Phaedrus* is no exoneration of rhetoric and poetry, though. The reason Socrates can harness the power of words for the good of Phaedrus is because he has yoked rhetoric to philosophy, as he claimed, in Book II of the *Republic*, they must be yoked. The words of philosophy have what the words of poetry, for Plato, sorely lack: rootedness in truth. Married to philosophy, poetic words can become ontologically moored. But to be a poet is precisely to trade on the unmooredness of words, as to be an image-maker is to trade on an appearance that passes as reality. It is, in fact, the imagistic character of rhetoric that is such a problem. Only to the extent that speech becomes like rationality (*logos*) is it salutary. The image here is a concession, not a savior. If *Phaedrus* gives us the possibility that human-made art might simulate the role of the demiurge's acheiropoietic universe and mediate the intelligible by the sensible, such possibilities are not extended to the image qua image. The image remains suspect until it comes under the authority of philosophy.

3. Plotinus: The Appearance of Invisible Reality

Where Plato frequently focuses on the images of poetry and rhetoric, Plotinus (204/5–270) gives his most memorable discussion of the image through two stories about visual art and artistic representation. In his *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry introduces Plotinus with an anecdote about an image. When one of his students asked that a portrait of him be made, Poltinus objects: "Why really, is it not enough to have to carry the image in which nature has encased us, without your requesting me to agree to leave behind me a longer-lasting image of the image, as if it was something genuinely worthy looking at?" ([5], p. 3) The critique repristinates Plato's criticism of images as at a third remove from reality, which is defined by the world of forms. The universe is an image of this reality, and so, like Plato's painters of beds and flutes, Plotinus' portrait-maker simply makes a worse, further-removed—and so inevitably less accurate—image of that image. Here Plotinus, as represented by Porphyry, sounds like a good disciple of Plato. But in Plotinus' own writings, he tells a story that implies a more hopeful possibility for the image.

Plotinus tells the story of a portrait-maker named Pheidias making a portrait of Zeus ([6], V.8.1, pp. 410–11). Pheidias is a prodigiously gifted maker, and so he makes, not a physical imitation of Zeus—who has seen Zeus?—but what he imagines Zeus should look like, given the kind of being Zeus is. This vision of art leads not to a proscription of artists but to a maxim for them: Art must not copy reality ([7], p. 21). Plotinus' artist need not imitate the divine artisan's work (the visible universe), for she can imitate the divine artisan himself. Plotinus denies the image must operate on a logic of visible resemblance. As Phedias sculpting Zeus exemplifies, the artist can create a visible imitation of the intelligible realm.

There are a few important shifts here from Plato's conceptualization of the image. First, for Plotinus, art is not necessarily at a third remove from reality. While art can be at a third remove from reality (the portrait for which Plotinus refuses to sit, the bed painting that Plato describes), it is yet possible for human-made art to tap into the same possibilities as the acheiropoieta. Human art can be an image of reality—not just an image of an image. The second shift to note is the way human images achieve this nearness to reality by eschewing visual likeness as the standard for imaging. Plotinus exposits a more hopeful possibility for human-made images by unshackling them from Plato's mimetic logic, when that mimesis is understood through physical resemblance. For Plotinus, the great artist makes images the way the divine artisan does, by tapping into the intelligible world and making an image that is like it. Humans have the potential to make an elevated, perhaps even sacred art—an art that can yield to us divine realities just as the universe itself can. Human-made images can bear likeness to the divine.

In identifying a type of human-made image that can work like the divinely-made images in Plato, Plotinus attenuates Plato's anxiety about images and magnifies his hopes for them. But Plotinus' new possibilities for human-made images raises important questions. In what way, exactly, are they like the divine? How might a mere mortal generate such likeness? While Christian thinkers quickly take up these new possibilities for imaging Plotinus proposes, they will not be able to resolve these questions for a few more centuries.

4. Gregory of Nyssa: Preserving the Wedge between Appearance and Reality

At the Seventh Ecumenical Council—the one that vindicated images—Iconodules hailed Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–394) as the Father of the Fathers in the face of the Iconomachs' attempt to enlist his theology toward their own ends ([8], 224b-d). Like Plato and Plotinus before him, Gregory bears witness to impulses both to fear and love images in his thought. He attenuates the Platonic political anxiety about images and transforms the Platonic worry about the way images track in the appearance/reality dichotomy. He also follows Plotinus' interest in images that attempt to present divine realities. However, he is more concerned with how these images present it rightly.

In showing Gregory's friendliness to their cause, the Iconodules of Byzantium and today alike frequently quote from Gregory of Nyssa's *Encomium to Saint Theodore*. There he describes the images adorning God's temple as "images of flowers made in the likeness of the martyr's virtues, his struggles, sufferings, the various savage actions of tyrants, assaults, that fiery furnace, the athlete's blessed consummation and the human form of Christ presiding over all these events" [9]. These images, Gregory says, in an argument that will become familiar in the West, are like a book, "skillfully interpreting by means of colors which express the martyr's struggles and glorify the temple with resplendent beauty" [9]. The pictures on the temple's walls are, like the martyrs themselves, witnesses to the divine.

Yet Gregory does not reduce images to imprecise word or book substitutes. Images work differently than words. Like Plato before him, Gregory acknowledges that images can work on the passionate parts of the soul, arousing feelings logos might not. However, unlike Plato, Gregory does not see this as reason to fear images. In his *Encomium to Saint Theodore*, he describes how the images and relics of the martyr can move one to "tears of reverence" [9]. An image's ability to work on the passions speaks, for Gregory, to a virtue of images. They elicit virtuous tears. For ultimately, in Theodore's tomb, what one weeps over is Christ, and in weeping, one becomes more like Christ.

Because all the images he treats are true images, Gregory sounds a more hopeful note about images than Plato, but he is not completely sanguine about them. Plato's central anxiety about the disjunction of appearance and reality returns in Gregory's thought. As Plato worried that images work by a kind of trick, whereby appearance is presented as reality, so Gregory worries that the beholder might confuse image with prototype. His worry surfaces in the *Life of Moses*, as Moses ascends Sinai into the "luminous darkness" that marks God's presence at the summit. The luminous darkness teaches Moses what the commandments against graven images will later reiterate: that the Divine

must not be likened to any "comprehensible image". To identify the divine with any image or any concept is to turn the image into an idol that no longer witnesses to God (literally, a περιληπτικ φαντασία) ([10], pp. 95–96). As Gregory explains, "all names have equally fallen short of accurate description" ([10], p. 99). Even important names of God culled directly from Scripture, names like physician, shepherd, protector, bread, vine, and way—these, too, fall short of God. The very words and images of Scripture can become idols. We can never eradiate the danger of confusing sign with signified, appearance with reality. The image is in this way always a threat.

Despite the perpetual danger that a sign may circumscribe God, Gregory does not commend eradicating signs. That would mean getting rid of Scripture itself, the source of many images about God. Neither does Gregory insinuate that the theologian must limit herself to the images of Scripture. Instead, the theologian must simply learn to rightly heed this danger of signs. For not only are signs of God unavoidable, they are also salutary. Gregory gives us this positive view of images when he exposits the Scriptural episode of the Israelites on the golden calf.

As he interprets the people of God's life with images in his *Life of Moses*, Gregory spends more time meditating on the bronze serpent than on the golden. Where the golden calf serves much of the Jewish and Christian traditions as a warning about idolatry and a rallying cry for iconoclasts, the bronze serpent is a much more positive image in the life of the people of God. As the Israelites are perishing of snake bites, they are healed by looking at the bronze serpent Moses has made. Poisoned by snakes, they are healed by the image of a snake. For Gregory (as for the writer of the gospel of John), the snake on the pole prefigures Christ on the cross. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14 RSV). The bronze serpent heals the people of God in its likeness to the snakes that poisoned the people of God, as Christ heals the people of God in the likeness of sin that poisoned them ([10], p. 124). Christ saves us as an image, like the Bronze Serpent image saved the Israelites. Gregory will not denounce all images.

It becomes tricky (though not impossible) for Christians to denounce images Christ is described in Scripture as the Image of the Invisible God. In an important move for Christian theology, Gregory of Nyssa's older brother Basil describes Christ's relation to the Father with the analogy of empire images, and for Gregory, the category of image points to humanity's own hope. Humanity will, in imitation of Christ, be eventually remade into a glorious image of Christ, ascending from glory to glory ([10], pp. 136–37). Christ and humanity's end in Christ point to hopeful possibilities for the image.

Rather than condemn images, Gregory instead commends an apophatic reserve. Images and concepts of God must always be interpreted against the background of the luminous darkness that warns us not to confuse image with imaged. Gregory does not ban poets or forbid images; he wants to resituate them for us, to mitigate this temptation to confuse image with prototype.

With that apophatic reserve funding his attitude toward images, Gregory proliferates them in his writing, especially in his most so-called mystical texts, *The Life of Moses* and the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Gregory gives many images of God in his writings, even as he is aware of the way any image can become an idol. This proliferation of images works with, rather than against, his apophatic reserve, to keep the faithful from confusing an image's likeness to the divine with its identity to it. Thus, though he shares a version of Plato's image anxiety, he wants to address it not by doing away with images but by highlighting the wedge between appearance and reality that Plato worries images intrinsically confuse.

5. Augustine: God-Made Images That Yield the Divine and Human-Made Images that Do Not

Though he treats images and image-adjacent concepts like "vestige" all throughout his corpus, Augustine (354–430) arguably makes his richest exploration of images in the *Confessions*. There he displays for the reader the temptations posed by human-made images, chiefly the theater, and the possibilities opened by God-made images, principally creation. Like Gregory of Nyssa, he draws from and transforms Plato's and Plotinus' hopes and fears, but he picks up on different strands of Platonic image theory. Where Gregory of Nyssa writes primarily about Christian images, Augustine, like

Plato, lives in a world suffused with images he believes to be false. Incidental worries about images thus compound his intrinsic ones. Unlike Plato, though, he makes no attempt to ban image-makers. He finds a different solution to the problem of the image.

Augustine critiques theater in multiple places in his corpus. In the *City of God*, he treats the competing spectacles of pagan theater and Christian liturgy. In his homilies on the Sermon on the Mount, he even figures vice through the theater. Yet his most interesting critique comes in his brief but colorful description of theater in the *Confessions*. He describes early in Book III how he was "spellbound by theatrical shows full of images (*plena imaginibus*) that mirrored my own wretched plight" ([11], III.2, p. 37). Why would a wretched person seek to behold wretchedness on a stage? It is because spectators of tragedy enjoy a pleasurable version of sadness. The sadness tragedy arouses imitates the sadness of mercy so that the spectator experience herself as merciful, and the spectator enjoys that feeling of her own mercifulness. The spectacle of sadness thus paradoxically provokes feelings of pleasure.

Attempting to deflate such self-aggrandizing pleasure, Augustine argues that the mercy theater arouses is false on three counts. First, it is false because it grieves for the wrong things. It grieves for the separation of adulterous lovers, for example, when it is far better to grieve over the parties' delight in their sinful deeds. ([11], III.2, pp. 38–39). Second, the mercy is false because it does not seek to alleviate the suffering of those who are its supposed object. The theater-goer feels sorrow but does nothing about it. "[H]ow real is the mercy evoked by fictional dramas?" Augustine asks. "The listener is not moved to offer help, but merely invited to feel sorrow..." ([11], III.2, p. 38). Indeed, the fact that the theater-goer seeks out that feeling of sorrow in order to feel merciful indicates just how far from mercy that feeling is, for a truly merciful person, Augustine insists, would never wish to see others miserable so that she could show mercy. Then there is a third reason the mercy is false: it arises from a sorrow he seeks to distract him from the true sin-induced sorrowfulness of his own soul ([11], III.2, p. 39). It arouses a decoy sadness that keeps one from wrestling with one's own deep sadness and, perhaps, showing mercy to oneself by seeking healing for that deep sadness.

The first criticism against the images of theatrical shows is clearly incidental: Tragic theater is a problem to the extent that it images sinful actions. Augustine may not have been able to imagine another kind of tragedy, but certainly readers of Augustine can. It is not a necessary feature of tragedy that it valorize sin, however often tragedy does that.

It is much more difficult to assess the next two criticisms. The second criticism that theater teaches a mercy that is false because it is purely emotive rather than active is undoubtedly bound up with the kind of tragedy Augustine watches (which sounds rather like soap opera), but it arises from something internal to images: that they project an appearance and are not reality. When one pities a fictional character, there is no one to show mercy to. The object of one's mercy is a phantasm, a mere appearance that signifies no real person. One's emotions, then, are truly engaged, but the situations eliciting them are not. Thus, one's emotions are aroused without the possibility of becoming virtues. They simply wall one further into one's own inner life extending the self and bending it toward vice. Thus, in the third reason for mercy's falseness, tragedy can distract the spectator from his vice, even as it promotes it. Theater, in this section, is a school of vice, just as in his homilies on the Sermon on the Mount, it is a figure for vice ([12], p. 3).

At the end of the section on theater in *Confessions*, Augustine contrasts the false mercy evoked by tragic spectacle with the true mercy of God. "Far above me your faithful mercy was hovering," Augustine writes ([11], 3.3, p. 39). Where is that mercy? It is most beautifully and visibly displayed in the Eucharist, the "sacred mysteries" that God continually offers, even as Augustine indulges in carnal desire during their very celebration ([11], 3.3, p. 40). In the gift of the Eucharist God shows Augustine true and unrelenting mercy, mercy the theater falls far short of.

While Augustine worries about the pagan images of the republic, he offers a more hopeful role for images that are not human-made. The acheiropoietic universe has a much more positive role to play in imaging the divine for humans. The universe declares the glory of God, as the Psalmist proclaims, and Augustine sounds this theme throughout Book X of the *Confessions*. There he questions created

things, which respond by insisting that they are not God. Augustine asks them to declare something about God, and they replied that God made him ([11], 10.6, p. 202). The Trinity, the Eucharist, and Christ are all imaged in creation. Creation gives us the divine, and yet, at the same time, creation also leads Augustine astray. His famous passage "Late have I loved you" speaks to Augustine's love for the beautiful things of the world, that should speak to him of God but instead hold him back from God. He loves them as idols rather than images—a theme that recurs throughout the *Confessions*, from the very beginning in Book I. Even when Augustine was enslaved to idols, God broke through his idolatry so that Augustine could love created images rightly. In sum, *Confessions* presents creation as bearing the possibility of eliciting contemplation of the divine, but also bearing the darker possibility of arousing idolatry, intervening in our relationship to the divine, trapping us with its materiality.

So Augustine sounds rather like Plato. The universe, which is an acheiropoietic image, can lead us to contemplate the divine, though it might not, while human-made images pose a much more serious threat. They often, perhaps usually, tutor us into vice. Still, Augustine does not go all the way with Plato in exiling the image-makers. He might want to banish all the currently practicing poets in the city, but he does not think it is possible to get rid of human-made images altogether. Humans need images, and images hold inescapable sway over humans. Augustine tells the story of Alypius to illustrate what happens when a person attempts to simply deny the force of images. Recognizing that he is possessed by a distorted love of gladiatorial spectacle, Alypius is nevertheless carried to the gladiator show against his will. He closes his eyes and attempts to direct his mind away from the spectacle, but as the crowd, "heaving with thoroughly brutal pleasure" then roars with excitement, curiosity overtakes him and so, according to Augustine, Alypius is wounded in soul more grievously than the gladiator is in body ([11], 6.8, p. 108). Augustine describes the fall in rhetorical detail, as Alypius gulps in the vision of blood, "intoxicated on sanguinary pleasure" ([11], 6.8, p. 109). The will is weak before the image. God must save him, and God's mercy is not to deny Alypius—or any of us—images. To deny images is to attempt to deny our creatureliness. God's mercy is to give us different images, which impart virtue and knowledge of God. (God's ultimate mercy, of course, is to give the perfect image of Godself in Christ, though even that perfect image is misperceived, as Augustine meditates on in his homilies on John. For some, the flesh of Christ is seen but not the Godhead.)

Where Plato privileges philosophy above poetry as the way to contemplate the divine and the world rightly, Augustine sees this as an elitist path marked by pride. Instead, Christian liturgy, in Augustine's *City of God*, forms an alternative spectacle that forms its viewers virtuously, in contrast to pagan spectacle ([13], 2.28, pp. 85–86). One place the *Confessions* exemplifies this difference is in the case of saint's stories. Where the tragedies of fictional characters distracted Augustine from the real sadness of his own life, the stories of saints work differently. Book VIII of *Confessions* is a cascade of conversion stories—Victorinus, Ponticianus, Antony, etc.—that brings Augustine's vice before his eyes. As he narrates Ponticianus' story of multiple conversions, Augustine describes the effect on himself, in address to God: "You sent me down before my face, forcing me to mark how despicable I was, how misshapen and begrimed, filthy and festering. I saw and shuddered. If I tried to turn my gaze away, he went on relentlessly telling his tale, and you set me before myself once more, thrusting me into my sigh that I might perceive my sin and hate it" ([11], 8.7, p. 159). The image of the saints does not, like the image of the tragic heroes, push his sin-induced sorrow away; it presses it before his eyes more urgently.

These stories make Augustine see his soul more clearly, and even more, they make him want to change it. He describes how the story of Victorinus inspires him with ardor to follow his example ([11], 6.5, p. 153), but his sin-deteriorated will drags him back down into the filth. The stories of the saints and the spectacle of the liturgy, while they are as much images as tragedy and gladiatorial fights, do not evoke the same kind of anxiety about the distinction between appearance and reality. In fact, these images offer even more aid to the virtuous life than the acheiropoietic image that is creation, which can more easily misdirect our love. They are not third-order images but are like

Plotinus' Zeus statue, running back up to reality itself. They are given to the human, we might say, as a divine mercy, by the God who continues to give the mercy of the Eucharist even to those who reject it.

So Augustine sequesters the Platonic anxiety about images to pagan spectacles. Christian images overcome the disjunction between appearance and reality that makes pagan images at a third remove from reality. For Christian images can mediate reality itself, even better and more immediately than philosophy. Yet Augustine does worry that creation—an image wrought only by the divine hand—might turn us away from rather than toward God, if we respond to its appearance rather than its reality. He does not betray the same anxiety about liturgy, but neither does he offer a clear theological reason why liturgy might not itself attract us to appearance rather than reality. For exactly what kind of relationship does the appearance of Christian images have to the reality they present? This is a question that will increasingly gall theologians, until it comes to a crisis in late Byzantium.

6. John of Damascus: The Veneration that Passes through the Image to the Prototype

While Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa wrote during times of crisis in the church, those crises pivoted on Trinitarianism, sacraments, grace, Christology—not images. John of Damascus (675/6–749), on the other hand, wrote in the midst of a pitched image crisis. In his writings, the more general Platonic concern about the relation between appearance and reality mutates into a more specific concern about the relationship between the image and its prototype. In the many arguments he levels against the Iconomachs, one central theme becomes determinative for the Byzantine image controversy: that the case for images rises and falls on Christ.

It is because of who Christ is, Damascene claimed, that images once forbidden are now permitted. For Christ is the Image of the invisible God, the divine come to dwell visibly among us, and the Incarnation of Christ changes everything. The Incarnation is an image that ushers in a new era of signification. Damascene elaborates the Incarnation's authorization of images in terms of both the likeness and the unlikeness of images to the imaged.

The arguments for likeness and unlikeness express competing impulses: to hedge against idolatry by claiming the likeness between image and prototype and to hedge against idolatry by differentiating one's relationship to the image from one's relationship to the prototype. The former line of argument can be found in Damascene's taking up of Basil's contention about the Incarnation. Drawing an analogy with the cultural practice of honoring the emperor by honoring his image, Basil argues that the veneration of Christ is one with the veneration of the Father because Christ shares the same nature as the Father. It is an argument for understanding Christ as *homoousios* with the Father, but Damascene uses it to express an analogy with icons. As with Christ and the Father, so with icons of Christ and Christ: the honor given the image passes through to the prototype ([14], 1.21, p. 34, Quoting Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 18.45). His argument, which becomes central to Christian image theology, is developed and elaborated in later centuries. Damascene's version of it turns on a distinction between image and its media. An image is not wood and paint; an image is that which opens out toward the prototype. To venerate the image properly, then, is to venerate it as that which opens out to the prototype. The veneration is ultimately directed at the prototype; as Damascene insists, its passes through the image. Someone who venerates the wood and paint—the media rather than the prototype—betrays true iconodulia.

In a way, John of Damascus is much more optimistic about images than Augustine or even Gregory of Nyssa. He does not worry about images leading us astray, for he is confident that the Incarnation inaugurates an era when we are no longer in danger of images misguiding us (an argument he makes in stridently anti-Semitic terms). He also asserts a profound oneness of image and prototype, such that the honor given the one passes through to the other. Yet he couples this strategy with another that reveals the fragility or incompleteness of his conceptualization of unity. He distinguishes the various kinds of honor one can give sacred objects, including images.

Damascene famously distinguishes adoration (*laitreia*) from veneration (*proskynesis*). Adoration is the form of veneration given to the Creator who alone is venerable by nature. All other forms of

veneration are given to creatures. But Damascene's distinctions grow finer still, as he names five types of adoration and seven types of veneration. The five types of adoration—service, desire, thanksgiving, hope/petition, and repentance—correspond to the ways creatures stand in relation to their Creator. The seven types of veneration correspond to their different objects. First, there are those like Mary and the saints, who partake in God's nature by adoption; second, those like Mount Sinai or the wood of cross, by and in which God worked our salvation; third, those like the books of Scripture and chalices, which are dedicated to God; fourth, images that prefigure God's work to come; fifth, one another as having a portion of God; sixth, those in positions of authority; and seventh and most distastefully to the modern reader, the veneration slaves give masters ([14], 3.33–43, pp. 107–12). Since adoration is a type of veneration, according to Damascene, he delineates 12 forms of veneration altogether.

These forms of veneration can work with and against the argument for the unity between image and prototype. They work with it to the extent that they specify their unity. Toward that end, Damascene follows that Father of Hierarchies Pseudo-Dionysius to use hierarchy as a way to highlight relation, not separation. We encounter the divine in the lower parts of the hierarchy as sure as we do in the higher ones. Hierarchy is a way of expressing likeness; it helps illumine how images can participate in the movement from material contemplation to immaterial, that the beholder may become ever-more like God ([14], 1.33, 3.43–45, pp. 41, 113). However, even as the hierarchy expresses likeness, it also implies unlikeness. If likeness means that God can be encountered at any level of the hierarchy, unlikeness translates into the importance of ascending to higher levels and greater likeness. As the fourth form of creaturely veneration, images are right in the middle of the seven types. They may be like God; they may lead the beholder to become like God, but they are not as near to God as, for example, the chalice and Bible of the worship service. They therefore cannot be revered as highly as those items, on Damascene's terms. Where the likeness of the image to the prototype warrants one type of argument (the honor that passes through), the unlikeness justifies another (different types of worship). The implied significance of unlikeness pushes against the insistence unity of image and prototype, the two arguments subtly working against each other, undermining conviction in each other. Could not the unlikeness mean that honor does not pass through? Or the likeness mean they should be adored similarly? Before the Byzantine Iconomachy is over, likeness must be specified more concretely in relation to unlikeness. What kind of likeness can preserve the unity of image and prototype without collapsing the distinction between them?

7. Theodore of Stoudios: Hypostatic Likeness as the Unity between Image and Prototype

The theology of the icon reaches its Byzantine apex in Theodore of Stoudios (759–826), who exposits late antiquity's most mature form of the Iconodules' position. It is forged in the heat of Christological debate, as the Iconomachs and Iconodules charge each other with various heresies. One of the Iconomachs' central contentions against icons was that they could not be legitimate images because God gave the paradigmatic image of Christ, the Eucharist, which reveals the criterion for valid imaging: images must be *homoousious* with what they image. The Iconodules respond not only by challenging the claim that the Eucharist is an image (much less is it a paradigmatic one), but also by distinguishing a diversity of ways in which God is present in the world.

The icon, for Theodore, does not give divine presence in the way that the Incarnation does, nor in the way that the Eucharist does. Divinity is present different ways in the world. Distinguishing the divine presence images bear from the presence Christ bears in the Incarnation, Theodore writes, "If anyone then will say that the divinity is present in the icon, he will not deviate from the truth; indeed, it is also present in the representation of the cross and in all other divine implements; yet not by means of a natural union—indeed, they are not the flesh that is deified—but by virtue of a relational participation, where the participation happens in terms of grace and honor" ([15], 1.12, p. 56). Where the divine is present to creation in the Incarnation by a union of natures, the divine is present to creation in the icon by a relative participation. He goes on to explain what exactly that means.

To elaborate relative participation, Theodore, like John of Damascus, returns to the argument from Basil that the honor given the image passes through to the prototype. Like Basil and Damascene, Theodore sets up the argument for honor with the case of the emperor. Why is the veneration of the emperor and his image one? They are one, not because they are materially united, but because they share a form and appearance ([15], 2.17, p. 68). The artificial image of the emperor helps Basil illumine the Father's natural image of the Son, even though the two are very different kinds of images ([15], 2.25, p. 74). The emperor and his image share a likeness of appearance, as the Father and the Son share a likeness of substance. Theodore then extends this analogy, like Damascene before him, to icons. Yet where Damascene stops with simply asserting that honor also passes through icons to their prototypes, Theodore specifies the type of likeness to put alongside artificial/appearance and natural/substantial. He names this new likeness 'hypostatic' likeness (a likeness of person) ([15], 3.3.1, p. 109,). The honor given the icon passes through to the prototype because it is hypostatically like the prototype.

As a response to the Platonic anxiety about the disjunction of appearance and reality, Theodore's image theology offers rich possibilities. He does not pick up Damascene's argument that appearance and reality (image and prototype) are due different kinds of veneration but instead expands Damascene's argument that appearance and reality (image and prototype) are united in the icon by the likeness of hypostasis. He makes this argument by doubling down on Basil's argument about the oneness of veneration. In a bold section, Theodore writes:

> If it is the case that, because we offer veneration only to God, we should not venerate the image of Christ, on the round that we would be introducing two kinds of veneration instead of the one and only adoration, in accordance with the distinction between image and prototype, then the veneration to the Father and to the Son should also be dual, because of the distinction between the two hypostases. But this is impious to say; on indeed and the same [is the veneration] according to the obvious oneness of the divine nature, and one is also veneration of Christ and that toward his own image, in virtue of the oneness of the hypostatic similarity, and not because of the diversity of natures. ([15], 3.3.9, pp. 111–12)

Theodore's contribution to the discussion, then, is to allay worries about idolatry and the appearance-reality disjunction by identifying hypostatic likeness as the only feature of an icon salient to its veneration.

The implications of centering icon theology around hypostatic likeness are manifold. At one level, it answers the charge of idolatry. Theodore treats the accusation that to venerate an icon is to venerate creation by refusing to identify likeness with its material cause. In venerating the icon, the Iconodule does not venerate wood and paint—these are utterly unlike the prototype. Theodore writes: "[O]f course, the material of the image is not venerated, but rather only Christ who is expressed in likeness in the image. Thus, in his own icon, Christ does not give his own glory to anyone else, but rather he appropriates this glory for himself in the image, because the material is different from the likeness" ([15], 3.3.14, p. 113). The likeness that names the unity between image and imaged—the likeness that the channel by which honor passes from type to prototype is distinct from the material, for it is a likeness at the level of person.

If hypostatic likeness cannot be identified with its material cause, neither can it be identified with the appearance of the image. Unlike the image of the emperor, an icon might not look so very like the prototype. Addressing the issue of images that, for reasons of artistic skill, do not accurately represent the appearance of prototype, Theodore dismisses aspirations for perfect visual resemblance ([15], 3.3.5, p. 110). Looking like the prototype is a secondary concern, for the icon bears a likeness that cannot be conflated with appearance. This is a momentous move in the evolution of Platonic image anxieties: With his articulation of hypostatic likeness, Theodore has taken sacred images out of the realm of appearance and becoming and placed them in the realm of reality and being. Christ is really, hypostatically, present in the image. The image does not trade on a deception between appearance

and reality. Its appearance signifies a deep hypostatic reality. The sacred icon works at this level of hypostasis; appearance is incidental.

In accomplishing this transformation of image thought, Theodore builds on Plotinus' theology of the image. Like Pheidias' Zeus statue in Plotinus' *Enneads*, Theodore's sacred images can go back up to reality itself. But there is an important difference. The statue of Zeus might visually express the invisible Zeus, might make some Zeus-like way of being in the world, present to the viewer. Theodore's sacred images, however do still more. The icon of the saint makes the saint hypostatically present in the world, present in her very person, present such that she can receive the honor we give her by her image. In this way, Theodore's innovation not only addresses Plato's worry about images that deceive; it also addresses Augustine's worry that images might cultivate false virtue (false mercy) by eliciting an emotion without an object. In the sacred image, there is an object (a subject) to receive our prayers, our laments, our worship. The honor given the image passes to Christ or the saint who is hypostatically present to it.

Even in this momentous shift of the image from the realm of appearance to the realm of reality, Theodore of Stoudios does not resolve all possible anxiety about images. How could he? The first six ecumenical councils did not obviate the possibility of future Christological heresy, so how could he or the seventh council secure images from future abuse and worry? Yet his image theology did lay the groundwork for future resolutions image anxiety. In the East, where his theology was remembered and taken up into its tradition of thought, icons have enjoyed a more tranquil history than in the West, where the dominant justification for images is the way that gives visual form to stories (as books for the illiterate). They have, in the East, lived up to their Platonic potential of entering into and moving the soul, not just of children, but of all who put themselves in their presence.

8. Conclusions: Icon Theology through and beyond Theodore

What I have traced above are some snapshots in evolving Platonic hopes for and anxieties about the image in early Christianity. I began with Plato's complex attitude toward the image, which he both appreciated and feared for its immense pedagogical power. He leveled both incidental critiques against images he deemed false and ill-suited to the cultivation of virtue, and intrinsic critiques about images as such—that images trade on deception, presenting appearance as if it is reality. Thus he bans the poets from his ideal city. Nevertheless, some more hopeful possibilities for the images emerge in Plato's discussion of the universe as an acheiropoietic image made by a divine creator and of the rhetorical images created by the philosophically-grounded Socrates. Both kinds of images have the possibility of encouraging contemplation of the divine, and so imparting truth and nurturing virtue. Plotinus extends Plato's thought and identifies a new possibility for the image: that it can represent a here-to-for unseen reality, one from invisible world of forms. Such images, like Pheidias' Zeus, do not imitate what is seen; they imitate what is unseen and so have special moral, epistemological, and pedagogical value, acquiring some of the authority of acheiropoietic images. Plotinus' image mitigates the strong appearance-reality distinction.

The next two snapshots came from Christian theologians, the first offering a more auspicious outlook on images, the second a more apprehensive appraisal. For his more positive spin, Gregory of Nyssa offers an interesting inversion of the Platonic concern with the appearance-reality disjunction. He does not worry that images are at a third-remove from truth, but that this third-remove will be forgotten. His misgiving concerns images that are conflated with divine reality and so taken to circumscribe the divine. Images for him ought to be welcomed into Christian theology under an apophatic reserve. As for Augustine, when he writes about secular images—particularly the theater—he articulates a darker take on images, specifically their moral consequences. His qualms are both incidental—the images valorize and mourn the wrong things—and intrinsic. He worries that the images catechize the beholder into false mercy by providing no reality for the emotions they elicit to serve. Nevertheless, Augustine, like Plato, also has great hopes for acheiropoietic images.

In the Byzantine Iconomachy, the image anxieties and hopes come to the fore in a crisis about the role of images in the worship life of the church. John of Damascus tries to placate image anxieties by arguing both against a strong disjunction between appearance and reality, as when he claims the honor passes from image to prototype; and also for this disjunction, as in his multiple distinctions between true worship and the various forms of veneration given to different sacred objects, including images. These two arguments unsettle one another, and Theodore of Stoudios later resolves the uneasiness in favor of the argument of unity between image and prototype. He clarifies that the prototype is hypostatically present to the image, and so the image is grounded in an invisible reality rather than the realm of appearance. As Christ's imaging of the invisible God becomes paradigmatic for how theologians think about images, the anxiety about images begins to fade.

This is a story, then, largely about quelling image anxiety by overcoming the disjunction between image and prototype, appearance and reality. Yet the careful reader may observe that there are at least two unresolved threads to the narrative: the weight Plato and Augustine place on the acheiropoietic image and Nyssen's call for apophatic reserve in treating images of the divine. Both arguments become important in the Christian tradition of iconography.

In the Byzantine image controversy, Iconomachs lift arguments for acheiropoietic images to slander human-made images, such as what they saw in churches. The Iconodules respond by incorporating the acheiropoietic image into the iconic image, such that the iconic image both is and is not acheiropoietic. It is not acheiropoietic because the iconographer writes the icon with her own hands, painting it with natural materials. It is acheiropoietic because ultimately, this painting alone does not make the picture of the saint an icon of the saint. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. In some Orthodox traditions, the Holy Spirit makes the picture an icon when the icon pattern is accepted in a ceremony of special blessing, and the priest brings his hands down over the picture in a gesture of epiclesis that mirrors the Eucharistic epiclesis. As the Spirit hovers over the elements, making Christ really present to the bread and the wine, so the Spirit hovers over the picture, making Christ hypostatically present to the image. In other traditions, the Spirit makes the divine present to the icon through the prayers of the iconographer. In either case, as only the Spirit makes the painting a true image, the icon is acheiropoietic. Human hands make the image, but the Holy Spirit grants it likeness. The visual expression of this theological claim is a version of the icon that celebrates the Triumph of Orthodoxy, in which the acheiropoietic image of the Holy Face is depicted in the middle top of the icon. It emphasizes that the tradition of images was inaugurated and authorized by God alone [16].

As for Gregory of Nyssa's desire for apophatic reserve, the iconographic tradition keeps faith with this concern by continuously cycling back to it. It becomes particularly important to the revival of icon theology in the 20th century, in which theologians like Leonid Ouspensky, Vladimir Lossky, Paul Evdokimov, and Pavel Florensky emphasize apophatic themes in the icon's renunciation of resemblance of naturalism. That the likeness resides in the hypostasis rather than in the appearance helps protect the beholder from idolatrously identifying the image with the prototype [17]. It is an image that telegraphs its own visual dissimilarity—in space, line, and color. Thus the icon has a word of silence—a negation of itself as visual form—built into its pictorial rhetoric. Apophatic reserve becomes one more theological benefit to identifying iconic likeness as hypostatic, a move by Theodore of Stoudios that helped to stabilize the East's iconographic tradition from further wild Platonic mood swings.

What migh this mean for image theory today? Modernity has inaugurated its own set of hopes and fears for the image, as well as a meta-anxiety about describing the image. Many visual theorists today—including Hans Belting, W.J.T. Mitchell, Horst Bredekamp, and Keith Moxey—are dissatisfied with what they may see as a Kantian or Platonic framing of the image, that interprets the image as a lifeless object pointing to a vitality beyond it. They worry about theorizing this disjunction between appearance and reality. Attempts to recover the image as a presence to be encountered rather than an object that points to meaning elsewhere have sometimes been misconstrued as animism. However, Theodore and the history that made his thought possible can help thread a path between these twin

image dangers of Kantianism (or certain understanding of Platonism) and animism, helping to identify a presence give without collapsing the image into that presence. As Theodore helped Christian Platonists develop a theology that affirmed images, he may also prove salutary in helping visual studies scholars today develop an image theory that similarly affirms images.

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