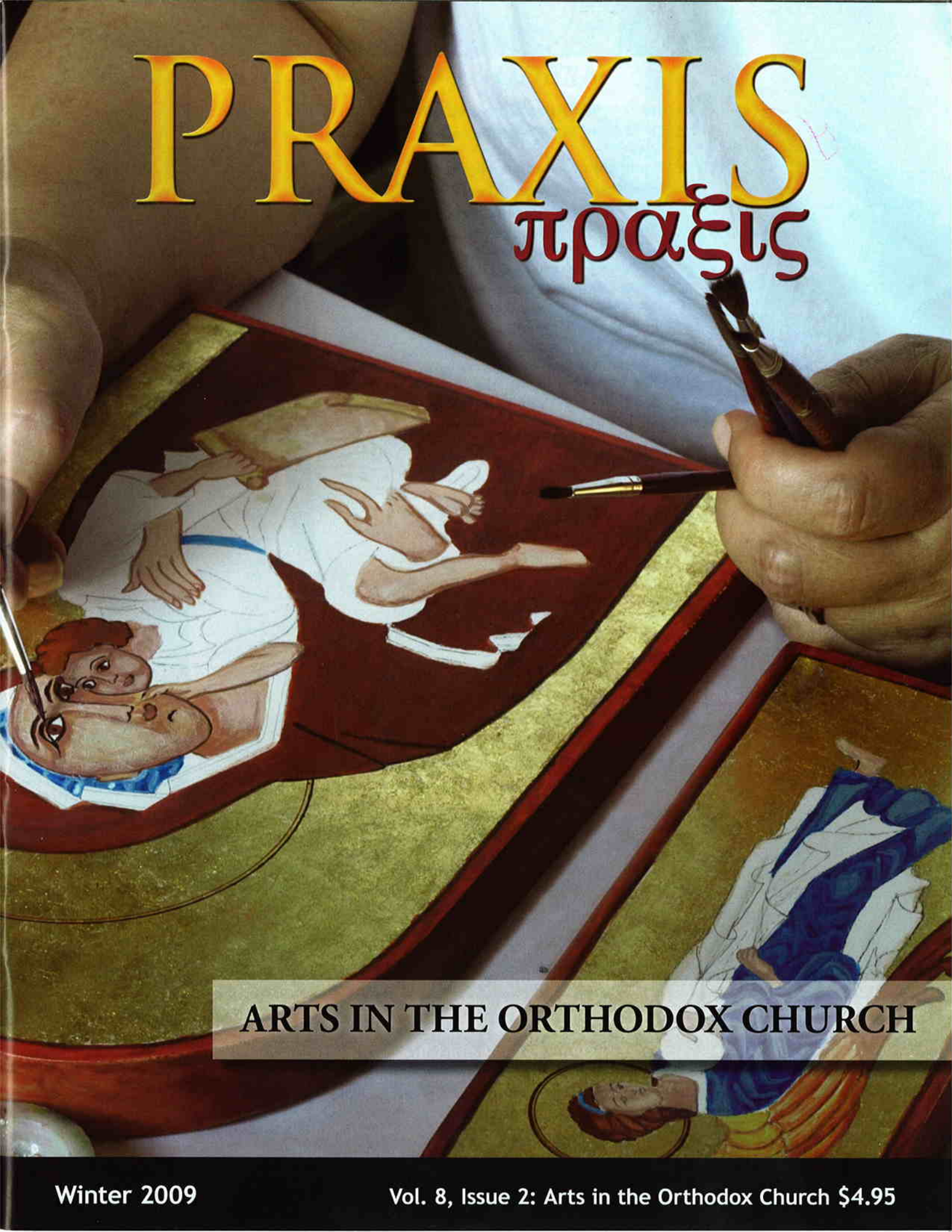


PRAXIS

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ARTS IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

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This issue of *Praxis* magazine, a regular publication of our Archdiocese Department of Religious Education, considers the important role of “The Arts in the Orthodox Church.” Though the term “arts,” when standing alone, can be open to wide usage and interpretation, this issue of *Praxis* places this term in the specific context of religious education and our Orthodox Church. By providing this context, as illustrated by the many articles that follow, “the arts” is a precise term to reference not only the many, but also the specific ways related to aesthetic means by which we process our human understanding of God, and how we teach this understanding to others.

Artistic expression in the life of the Church, from the viewpoint of education and worship, is wide-ranging. Among some of these expressions are the sacred hymnology of the Church, the Holy Iconography, our church architecture, and the myriad of expressions by which we praise and glorify God through utilizing all of our human faculties and senses. Each of these expressions alone could be, and indeed are, the contents of thousands of books and treatises. This issue of *Praxis* offers us a broader survey of how all of these expressions, as “arts,” integrate learning, worship, and faith in a unique and most dynamic way.

As always, I am thankful to the diligent staff of the Department of Religious Education for producing this welcome publication and for elaborating upon this topic in such lucid detail. I am also pleased that this issue includes another segment commemorating the Year of St. Paul, the great Apostle of Christ, as is only befitting of any periodical dedicated to the high and noble task of religious education. I pray that this issue of *Praxis* will edify all its readers, particularly those in the field of religious education, in appreciating the many ways in which we as Orthodox Christians understand and praise our great and Almighty God, a God Who is not only the Lord of Truth and Love, the Lord of Peace and Justice, but also the Lord of the absolute Beauty, the permanent quest of any art.

Anthonios Demetrios

† DEMETRIOS
Archbishop of America

The Arts:

Theology in Color, Sound, and Action

DEAR READER,

“Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand” (Isaiah 64:8). A central teaching of Christianity is that God is the Creator, “of all things visible and invisible” as we recite in the Creed. The prophet Isaiah in the above passage provides us with an image of God as an *artist*, forming humanity the way a potter takes a lump of clay to form a beautiful object.

As Orthodox Christians, with our long, rich, diverse, and developing history of iconography, music, prose and poetry and architecture, I believe we instinctively appreciate the power of the arts in our lives of faith. We understand what Dewey meant when he wrote, “If all meaning could be adequately expressed by words, the arts of painting and music would not exist.” Faith and the presence of God in our lives are experienced and expressed many ways. Reading the Bible or studying texts from the Church fathers and contemporary theologians is just one way we can explore “our faith.” Viewing and contemplating the content of an icon, singing a hymn and reflecting on its lyrics, or spending a few moments in silent prayer within one of our churches are also ways of experiencing God in our lives. Of course, we can speed read the Bible, breeze past an icon, run through a hymn, or not even notice the space (and too often we do all of these), but when we engage any of them with deliberate intention, we are often surprised at what we find in them and in ourselves.

All the forms of “the arts,” from their classic forms in the life of the Church, icons and music, to more contemporary forms, such as video and photography can certainly teach people about their faith. However, they also allow us to explore and express our faith so that it can be shared with others. Vladimir Lossky

wrote, “If the mystical experience is a personal working out of the content of the common faith, theology is an expression, for the profit of all, of that which can be experienced by everyone.” Theology can be expressed in many forms – words, painting, music, etc.

An Orthodox Christian education should involve the study of texts, to be sure. But how many of our students will ever be asked to remember the content of their textbooks? They will be expected to remember the words to hymns, to describe an icon, or to name a sacred vessel. Involvement with the arts – creation and performance – is preparation for the praxis of faith. Performing in a skit or a play about the Good Samaritan can prepare us to become caregivers to those in need. Making a mosaic of an icon will lead to a closer study of its contents. So, our education programs should also incorporate the arts, from their study to their creation and performance. We are still very comfortable giving children the opportunity to draw, paint, make, and play in our classrooms. The arts also provide creative ways of exploring topics of Faith and Church. Older children and teenagers especially should also be given the opportunity to their lives of faith by creating websites, writing and performing plays, photography and video, in addition to more advanced and involved drawing, painting and craft-making. The arts continually remind us that faith is a verb.



Anton C. Vrame, PhD
Director

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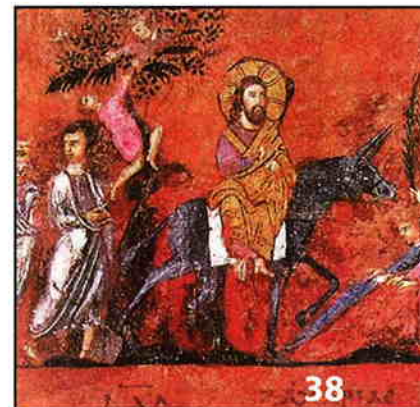
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Theology in Stone The Art of Architecture

By Christ Kamages, AIA

Traditionally, architecture has been defined as “the art and science of building.” The Roman architect Vitruvius declared, in the early first century AD, that the attributes of good architecture are “firmness, commodity, and delight” (or durability, utility, and beauty). Winston Churchill famously stated, “We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.” The Orthodox Christian tradition represents a unique and profound example of this intimate relationship between form and function. Architecture, theology, and transformation become bound in both the external and internal relationships between the faithful and their buildings, serving to define the spiritual attributes of devotion with bricks and mortar.

The Orthodox faith represents the living continuity of Christ-centered faith and apostolic lineage that is rich in theological tradition and specialized architectonic responses. The interrelationship of worship, art, and the physical forms create the House of God, the place of special presence, which is not an auditorium or meeting house or mere physical shelter, but Heaven on Earth. That holy environment as a crucible of prayer, iconography, sounds, and spiritual fragrance creates the unique connection between a momentous worldly position and the unworldly. Within the Orthodox tradition, sacred space in church architecture not only represents but also actually nourishes the relationship between the community and God, providing a way in which the people of God encounter Him and

each other in the course of worship, prayer, and sacrament. Whether it is individual prayer, liturgical worship, weddings, baptisms, or funerals for our family and friends, the physical environment of the Church provides the setting and context for those eternal and indelible memories, memories that reinforce the spirit of the never-ceasing continuum of the Church going on for the ages of ages.

The Orthodox Church stands as a rock of unchanged continuity, and there are related principles or precepts that serve to craft our physical environment. Merely creating an Orthodox church as a caricature of an ancient building is not enough. There is a myriad of complex technical, functional, and aesthetic performance issues that must be resolved harmoniously to create that sacred environment. A landmark example of this synthesis is the Great Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, a seminal building completed in 537 AD whose innovations have influenced Gothic and Renaissance architecture and whose presence and space was recruited by the Holy Spirit in the conversion of the people of Rus' to the Orthodox Church under Prince Vladimir of Kiev in the tenth century. Constantine Cavarnos defined the special nature of that Church environment in his writings:

Heaven with many lights . . . This dome, this soaring architectural device, was made on the pattern of the heavens that stand before us. . . . Below the dome of Hagia Sophia, I felt the Byzantine idea has a world-wide mission. . . . Never in the evolution of human art, have paintings succeeded in spreading heaven before us so superbly, so truly, so profoundly; at no other time did the feeling of rhythm and artistic knowledge find such a mature expression; at no other time was art so living and real.

The power of the influence and example of the Justinian Church of Hagia Sophia has been immense in not only converting the nation of Prince Vladimir to the Orthodox faith, but also in creating an inspiration for Christian and Islamic architecture that endures today, almost 1,500 years after its completion. This manifestation is extremely powerful and created the first major proclamation of an architectural form responding to liturgical needs of the Christian faith. This church broke the mold for Christianity, which until that time had been using the borrowed form of the secular Roman basilica for its church buildings

The nature of our Orthodox ecclesiastical and icono-

graphic traditions was developed by the Fathers to transform our earthly presence into that "heavenly environment," in the spirit of "linkage" and "connection," on a timeless continuum. From that lineage we pursue a series of key characteristic traditions that define Orthodox architecture:

1. A contained environment of Heaven on Earth, without regard to "earthly cares"
2. Dome (or dome surrogate) that is symbolic of heaven, eternity, the dwelling place of Christ Almighty, the Giver of Light and Life
3. Solid and stable, while pierced with light
4. A place representing the theology of light
5. Layers of space, darker contrasting with light
6. Spacious internal proportions
7. Apex/hierarchical proportions and massing (progression of three-dimensional interior spaces and exterior appearance)
8. Functional liturgical arrangements and potential
9. Gracious, well planned iconographic surfaces
10. Structural ingenuity

These traditions take many forms. Just as the Orthodox Divine Liturgy and theology exhibit linguistic variations as initiated by the work of Sts. Cyril and Methodios, Orthodox architecture possesses a timeless format and armature while demonstrating distinct regional expressions of materials and forms that create a rich mosaic of expressions throughout the world. Whether it is the Great Church of Hagia Sophia on the Bosphorus, the decorated onion domes of Kiev, the white-washed island churches of Santorini, or the wooden structures of Fort Ross, California, this masterful architecture engages and charges its environment. Orthodoxy accommodates regional and ethnic expressions without changing the basic architecture and ethos of true faith.

Well-designed Orthodox churches in America become instant local landmarks and conversation pieces—places of inspiration, awe, and welcome. This is because, more than being just another building, the Orthodox temple is a "vessel of fusion" and iconic magnification, reflecting the radiance of God's light on the exterior and receiving and transmitting His light on the interior. This is not accidental, as the Orthodox Church is rich in its traditions and practices. Certainly, even with the recognition that we are an "apophatic church" in that

Elements of Heaven on Earth

Orthodoxy has its roots in the great faith traditions of the East, crystallized in the refined expression of Byzantium. The design and building of such facilities dedicated to the glory of God is a sacred task rooted in the foundation of the Holy Orthodox faith, seeking to reflect the eternal flame, which is ever-burning yet never consumed.

As a bridge to the mysteries of the faith, a church's three-dimensional volumetric "canvas" facilitates, augments, and enhances the context of the "work of the people." Dedicated to the glory of God and His presence, the temple's synthesis of iconography, hymnography, theology, liturgical actions, and individual prayer transforms the God-inspired earthy materials and talents into "Heaven on Earth," a witness to the power of God at work and a place of transformation. A series of elements combines to transcend the profane world and call us into a deeper meditation:

- Holy tradition and liturgical action
- Functional and operational activities of the worshipping community
- The integral and integrated presence of iconography
- Acoustic performance
- Durability and permanence of structures
- Natural lighting
- Interplay of space, structure, and lighting
- A volumetric expression of domed and vaulted spaces, reflecting the heavens



we know what we do not know and allow a context for the holy mysteries, our Church has numerous rich traditions and purposes that are definable and that are key in defining that special place and presence, that Heaven on Earth.

Christian theology becomes expressed in the plan for an Orthodox church building. A successful plan will communicate the grandeur of the space while reinforcing a feeling of intimacy. Congregated together and embraced by the domed environment, the worshipper is pulled closer into the liturgy rather than being placed at arms' length, as they might be in a longer basilica. In the Orthodox temple, the community is embraced by the walls, which are surfaces for iconography and learning, and the dome above, just as Christ's love embraces the faithful, reinforcing the theology.

Orthodox architecture is living art that informs, teaches, transforms, and inspires. It is a physical composition derived from a process of creation that defines what we know about God and informs the community of a deeper truth. Symbolic and practical, its presence—and our presence within it—supports the transformative nature of the Divine Liturgy. More than a building, it is an inspiration of God that creates, with earthly materials, a sacred space designed to connect us and lead us along a path to unity with God. This is the greatest art of all.

Christ J. Kamages, AIA, is a nationally celebrated architect designer/planner, with a background as a teacher, research analyst, and manager. To date, Mr. Kamages has designed more than 120 community projects throughout the United States and Canada, each one unique and responsive to the needs of its people. In December 2000, he was inducted as an Archon Architekton of the Ecumenical Throne—a befitting title for a person who has been dedicated to the Great Church, development of Faith Communities and designing churches for almost forty years. For the last ten years, Mr. Kamages has served as Chairman of Board of Trustees of the Patriarch Athénagoras Orthodox Institute at the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley.