

Architectural renovations of body-as-temple

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This paper addresses the Christian religious tradition of understanding the human body as the ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’ within the context of body modification in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Drawing on ethnographic research in Jerusalem and Kansas City, interviews with artists and Orthodox Christians, and theological discourses on the body and art, this paper seeks to understand how the body is treated by Orthodox Christians and evaluates the ethical commitments and contestations around the human body and religious practice. The paper focuses specifically on tattooing practices, which, though typically prohibited in conservative forms of Christianity, are nonetheless practiced as a means of devotion in specific Eastern Orthodox Christian settings. These modifications to the body are taken in dialogue with ritual and practical concerns exhibited in Eastern Orthodox burial practice. The paper argues that while there are commonalities across Eastern Orthodox practice, the ethical implications of specific actions are highly contextualised and must be interpreted within local regimes of aesthetic behaviour.

In many forms of Christian tradition, the human body is taken to be a temple of the Holy Spirit¹. What this means is interpreted in a number of different ways, in dialogue with various theological understandings of the person, the Holy Spirit, and wider cultural systems. In most cases, it is used to restrict the kinds of things that can be done to the body—against sexual promiscuity, tattooing, piercing, or other practices which may be seen to blemish the body in some way and thereby make it less suitable as a dwelling for the Holy Spirit. What I pursue here is an understanding of the body-as-temple trope within the practice of Orthodox Christians. While this is done with some mind to the Oriental

¹ Taken from such passages of the New Testament as 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20, or Ephesians 2:19-22.

Orthodox practices – such as those spoken of in Antohin’s work on Ethiopian tattooing practice (this volume) – I focus on those practices done by Eastern Orthodox Christians.²

Eastern (Antiochian, Russian, Greek, Serbian, etc.) and Oriental (Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopian, etc.) Orthodoxies have some clear overlap, particularly in those local populations, such as in Egypt and the Levant, wherein the two Christian traditions live alongside each other and, at times, worship at the same sacred sites. Both principle case studies discussed in this paper, in fact, arise from contexts wherein there is active cross-pollination between Eastern and Oriental Christian tradition. But, while there is no doubt that the respective traditions are related, it is worth noting from the outset that they have different theologies of the image—something that will become important as the paper turns to discuss icons in relation to the body.

The paper first outlines the body-as-temple trope within a close network of related, often refracting, tropes of the person, the icon, and the church. Drawing from Orthodox Christian religious tradition – both in doctrine and practice – I develop these three tropes as the space within which the human body, and consequently its delimitations, can be understood. Looking at the ethical concerns around the body, I will address one specific type of temple renovation – the devotional tattoo – in order to offer insights into the Orthodox Christian body as a socio-cultural artefact. It is worth noting that while there is an extensive body of literature on tattoos in anthropology (see, for one example, Gell 1993), I reference none of it in this paper. This is because the kind of tattoo discussed here, what I am calling a ‘devotional tattoo’, is something of a specific practice better understood

² The distinction between ‘Eastern’ and ‘Oriental’ is problematic, but is the most readily available and commonly used language to make differentiation between two families of ancient Christian tradition. On a technical level, the Eastern Churches accept seven ecumenical councils while the Oriental Churches accept only the first three of these.

within the religious discourses of sacred images rather than broader comparative research on body art. The degree to which the tattooed individuals discussed in this paper consider and develop the planned design, the artistic craft by which the tattooist designs and paints the image, and cosmological and relational importance of the representation places this sort of tattoo in a nexus of themes including the body, icons, and the religious community. It is these themes to which I turn now.

The body

The Orthodox body is, I am told, unified with the soul. As priests will often say, 'We are not bodies with souls, nor souls with bodies. We are body and soul.' This unity between parts is understood to facilitate the transformation of one via negotiation with the other. For instance, the 3rd century theologian St Clement of Alexandria is able to wax eloquently about the effect – both beneficial and harmful – of exterior things upon the body and soul (Clement 2004). Furnishings, food, ointments and other consumables have, St Clement explains, a direct impact onto the wellbeing of the soul. Likewise the state of the soul has a direct impact on things such as bodily comportment. As I have argued elsewhere (Carroll 2016), this is closely related to how Orthodox Christian relics are understood to come into being. The body and soul together become holy; when the body and the soul are separated at death, Orthodox Christians continue to have a strong regard for the body. So the person is soul and body, and made, changed, transformed by other things in the world.

This permeable quality, where the interior and exterior factors and confluences around the person are in direct, continual negotiation produce the space within which pious Orthodox Christians live out their religious lives. This obviously produces certain kinds of anxieties about bodily practice. In the first order, there are the quotidian practices by which Orthodox Christians work to become holy, such as prayer, the observation of various

feasts and fasts, and a striving against what they understand as ‘the passions’. Often visualised as a garden, the soul needs to be tended. In this metaphor, the good plants are watered (by prayer) so that they may grow and bare fruit; the bad plants – the passions such as avarice, lust, pride, and selfishness – must be weeded by ascetical practices of self-denial (prayer, fasting, etc.). This relationship between the body and soul – and the consequences of one affecting change in the other, however, also holds a key place within the decision-making processes concerning human wellbeing. For example, at a recent daylong ‘retreat’ at a Greek Orthodox parish in the Kansas City area, roughly sixty Orthodox Christians from across Missouri and Kansas gathered for a series of lectures and discussions about Orthodox burial practice. The Serbian Orthodox Church has, just in the last few years, founded a monastery north of Kansas City. At the property, they have gained licencing to open a burial ground, and the daily practice of the monastery is structured in order to ensure that appropriate prayers usually included in daily Liturgical services can be said for the dead. As the speakers addressed the retreat, they – clergy, lay, and monastic – emphasised a number of concerns and considerations.

Orthodox bodies, for example, should not be cremated. They should not be embalmed. There was obvious preference to burials that did not use metal caskets nor any other technique that would hinder the complete and speedy decomposition of the body—‘it’s green, too,’ they said. In this issue of being ‘green’ there is a curious complementarity of value regimes between the Orthodox Christians in this Midwest setting and the wider cultural milieu. With this preference to what was alternatively called a ‘natural’, ‘traditional’, or ‘green’ burial, Orthodox Christians find themselves in dialogue with—as one of the

presenters pointed out—the same movement that advocates doula-births³ and, now, ‘death doulas’. Working against what some see as an unhealthy denial and separation from the phenomenon of human death, death doulas actively engage the dying and their loved ones in preparation for, and transition through, death. In the same way birth doulas bring the process of birth giving into – and they would say ‘back into’ – the home, death doulas work to bring home and make domestic and familial a part of human experience that has, in late modernity, been increasingly commercialised and outsourced. For Orthodox Christians the preference to bring home the death process touches on many of the general aspects—the importance of familial, close relations, without commercial involvement—, however, the impetus for such practices rest firmly, for Orthodox Christians, in the dignity and respect these practices are seen to afford the body. Listening to the conversation in the room, it was clear that people thought of the decommercialised and ‘green’ aspects of ‘natural’ burial as clear positives. But for the Orthodox Christian, the preference – while being informed by ecological consciousness or any other number of ‘sustainable’ or ‘natural’ inclinations –rests ultimately on the issue of respect for the body as an icon. The body even in death, it was explained, points to the person, and the person points to God.

The icon

This presents the first link in the network of related tropes. In Orthodox Christian anthropology (that is, the theology of humankind), the human person is understood to be an icon of God. Taken from the biblical account given in Genesis, humankind is understood to be created in the image and likeness of God⁴. This ontological position places the human person in a specific relationship of iconicity. Anyone familiar with

³ A doula is in some ways like a midwife, but is understood to provide a more holistic, and longer term, care to mother and child. Doulas are usually involved in birth-giving from early administration of pre-natal care through delivery and post/ante-natal care.

⁴ Genesis 1:26-27

Orthodox Christianity will be familiar with icons. These, usually painted, images are produced within certain traditional schools of iconographic style. They are considered to be visual theology, and the veneration – usually expressed in the bowing before or kissing – of icons is established as core dogma within the Seventh Ecumenical Council⁵. Icons, following the teaching of St John of Damascus (676 – 749 CE), are held to be a conduit of veneration. It is not the wood – they argue – that is being honoured. Rather, the veneration (e.g. prayer, kissing) given to the images passes to its prototype—whomever is represented within the icon. So, by saying that the body – even in death – is an icon of the person, is to say that affection, care, and respect given to the body is conveyed to the person, and by continuation is honouring to God. It is then taken as an act of worship, pleasing to God, for Eastern Orthodox Christians to care for the body of the deceased.

Icons are used in Orthodox worship and become sites of prayer through bodily engagement. This engagement includes bowing before the icon, kissing the image – often on the hand or an object – such as a Gospel book – being held by the imaged person (Carroll 2015); making eye contact with the saint such as to produce something like a darshanic and haptic gaze⁶ (Babb 1981); or processing it around the temple, church yard, or public space (Hanganu 2010). Icons are most commonly placed in the Orthodox temple and in Orthodox homes. While these certainly help produce the affective space of the temple, each icon is itself also a place of prayer. The Greek word here, *proskynitarion* (pl *proskynitaria*), refers to a devotional space – often an icon situated in a set-apart manner, allowing for quiet devotion. It comes from the word *proskynesis*, meaning to bow in worship. With these *proskynitaria* collected together in the temple, the temple can be seen

⁵ Thus taken as dogmatic for Eastern Orthodox, but as practice for Oriental Orthodox.

⁶ Darshan is the Hindu veneratory practice wherein the devotee looks at the image of a god (or their guru), and the god looks back. Haptic vision is a tactile seeing that results in a greater feeling of being touched, and is thus a highly intimate and corporeal gaze.

to represent the whole universe: in it is shown – via icons – the saints, the angels, and God. It is no coincidence that the main church in many monasteries is called the ‘katholikon’: literally, ‘icon, or image, of the universe’. This brings us to the second link in the network of tropes. Icons, like temples, are gathering (ekklesia) places of prayer; temples are icons of the universe.

The ekklesia

The gathering of the local church (the ekklesia) in a parish is, quite simply put, a collection of bodies. It is understood, however, to also be the body of Christ in any locale. One can see here a collapse of the multiple into the one: even as the temple, as an icon, is filled with icons, so too is the body of Christ a collection of bodies. The human and the ecclesia, too, are understood in relation to each other. The church is a macro person; the person is a micro church. This is the third link in this network of tropes. It is also worth noting a productive slippage in terminology between the church as edifice and the church as people. The church edifice – what elsewhere is spoken of as the temple for clarity sake – is, too, seen as a body. In the 24th chapter of the *Mystagogy* of St Maximus the Confessor (c. 580 – 662 CE), this great theologian of Orthodox Christianity postulates that the nave is the body and the sanctuary of the temple is the soul (Maximus 1985). The Church as the institution, throughout time and space, is also spoken of as the body of Christ. As such, each particular parish community is alternatively imagined as an appendage (hand, or – especially in reference to monastic communities – the heart) or, more commonly, as a fractal instantiation of Christ’s Body in the local environment. This scalar fractality can, it is important to note, also be true of one individual. This sort of thing may be expressed, for example, when a member of the congregation is known to visit an isolated neighbour in declining health. They are said to be ‘Christ in that context’. Thus, there is a certain fractal-

like quality⁷ of individual-as-collective in how Orthodox Christians understand their own individual and collective participation in Christ as his body, as the Church, in the church.

Thus the church—as a polysemic trope—may be understood as a productive melding or multifaceted abstract concept wherein it may take on any specific meaning (edifice, community, divine person, institutional organisation) in any given situation or be purposefully used to highlight the contiguity and transformative quality of any given aspect. Given the complexity of this trope of the ekklesia, the metaphorical implications as translated back into the other two tropes opens up considerable imaginations and analytical space for thinking through the ramifications of the body as icon and body as temple. Other tropes could be brought in, but these three will provide the space needed to move this discussion forward.

The body multiple and particle

What is particularly interesting to think through — especially in line with this collection on delimitations of the body — is that, in the shift between the multiple and the unitary, there arises the fact that bodies can be made particle. We know from anthropological work on the medical body that it is multiple (Mol 2002). In various contexts and under various constraints the body may be taken to be various things. Within Orthodox religious practice it is likewise taken to be multiple things. The body is the thing against which they struggle (as ‘the flesh’ and seat of the passions); it is also, however, the means to salvation as it is the thing through which the ascetical struggle is maintained. There arises a certain ambivalence about the body in Orthodoxy. Unlike gnostic traditions, which discount the body as evil, Orthodoxy holds the body as good, but as the seat of the passions the body

⁷ The idea of fractal persons can be seen also in Melanesia (e.g. Wagner 1991) and Africa (e.g. Taylor 1990).

must be controlled. The body, however, is not only multiple, but also particle. It can be assessed as a collection of parts and those parts may be at times addressed as individuated aspects. This body-multiple emphasis is simple enough though it raises an interesting point in Orthodox treatment of the dead body. I already mentioned that embalming is discouraged. It drains the blood, and, following metaphysics shared in Judeo-Christian understandings, ‘the life is in the blood’.⁸ To make matters worse – as the conference presenter tells those gathered for the retreat – during embalmment the blood is drained into the sewer. This is seen as inherently disrespectful, and there is an audible groan from the audience and a shaking of heads. Particularly in view of the fact that Orthodox Christians are supposed to dispose of blessed things in specific ways, such an inherently blessed thing as the blood should not be disposed of in such a defiling manner. Things, for example, like breadcrumbs and the stems of blessed grapes are to be put out into the garden where they will not be stepped upon nor come into contact with animal faeces. Icons, if they have become old and are no longer dignified to be used in prayer, are burned: and the ashes likewise should be treated respectfully, being placed in the garden without contact with faecal matter or spread to sea. Against this backdrop, the idea that the blood of the dead is simply drained into the sewer – definitionally a place of faecal matter – is deeply problematic.

What is done, then, to the parts is important to the whole. It is preferred that the blood not be drained at all. What is done to the blood in such cases that it is drained is likewise a concern. When one member from the audience raised the question of donating their body to scientific research, the option itself was not outright discounted—Orthodox Christianity generally has a positive outlook toward scientific enquiry—, but the rationale for concern (and dissuasion) was specifically situated in the uncertainty of what would be done to the

⁸ Leviticus 17:11.

body in the long term. Would it be laid to rest after its use with an Orthodox burial? Would it in its use be treated with the dignity and respect honourable to its holy status? In this way, it is seen that the Orthodox body, taken as a whole or taken in part, holds a highly important space within Orthodox practice such that in complex networks of value the ethical commitment to the dignity of the human body holds a high position within the hierarchy of moral values.

Axiomatic meta-values

This position is what Michael Lambek calls a ‘meta-value’, and is an ‘absolute standard of value’ able to arbitrate and commensurate other values: moral, cultural, and monetary (2008:141). Lambek draws upon what Roy Rappaport calls ‘cosmological axioms’—which may be implicit or explicit notions of how the world works, in other words, what is ‘natural’— and sees meta-values as being hierarchically superior values under which may fall any number of other values. In my reading of this, I see these cosmological axioms and the meta-values, by which ethical commitments are made to uphold the moral rightness of this cosmological order as it is understood to be, as often implicit, guiding principles undergirding and directing cultural practices. Axiomatic meta-values, I would argue, become most overt in crisis moments, or liminal periods of personal trauma and grief: such as in the death of a loved one. As such, we should expect to see the axiom of rough equivalence of person/icon/ekklesia become most salient during end of life and mortuary practice.

It is important to note that the rough equivalence between the person, the icon, and the ekklesia is only that: it is a rough equivalence. I have already mentioned that cremation is forbidden. Except in extreme situations — such as the legal requirement in urban Japan —

the bodies of Orthodox Christians are not to be burned. I have also just mentioned that icons, at the end of their use, are burned. If the body is an icon: why can it not be burned?

When asked, the aged hieromonk speaking about Orthodox burial practice explained that the human person is both the image *and* likeness of God. The icon is only the image. This likeness of God demands a higher degree of honour. The body should not be destroyed; the body should not be dismembered; the body should be treated in a 'natural' way. It is washed; a shroud is placed over it; it is placed in the earth, facing east. In burial it is positioned in such a way so as to face up, out of the grave at the resurrection. At its core, Orthodox Christian burial custom is undergirded by the genesis of mankind in anticipation of the fulfilment of time, as understood in their theology.

At the same time, however, that the blood should not be drained for embalming, a question from the audience asking about organ donation was met with general approval from clergy present from several Eastern Orthodox traditions. Even though it is a practice that breaks part of the body from the body, it was understood to be a great gift and act of self-sacrifice. Specific examples were given of beloved members of local parishes, people who were given a longer life because of donated blood and organ transplants. In a religion that wishes 'God grant you many years' at almost every festive occasion, to help lengthen another's life is to partake in provision of God's blessing (*evlogia*).

It seems, then, that the body-as-temple allows for architectural renovations, at least in some cases. But I was not in Kansas City to learn about dead people — it is an interest of mine and part of a larger project under way on the Orthodox body and how ethical and religious commitments to the body impact decision making practices of human well being. The day retreat on Orthodox burial seemed a happy coincidence ('divine provision', one person

suggested) in a week otherwise dedicated to shadowing and interviewing an iconographer and tattoo artist. While the two topics may not at first appear related, the day conference and related conversations about mortuary custom proved invaluable – as this article goes on to demonstrate – in thinking through the questions of iconography and tattoos.

Orthodoxy and tattoos

Tattoos are, by most Orthodox Christian voices, condemned. They are seen to be disrespectful to the body. The body-as-temple should be respected, kept pure, unblemished, they argue. Tattoos, on the other hand, glorify something that will pass away; they demonstrate vanity and pride; they are associated with sailors and prostitutes, and while the Church should minister to those and welcome them, it is assumed that Orthodox Christians with tattoos got those tattoos before becoming Orthodox Christian. Some, more conservative voices, assume that tattooed converts will, if financially able to do so, get them removed.

In July 2015, I visited a tattoo artist in Jerusalem. Following in a family of tattooists going back seven hundred years, Wassim lives in Bethlehem, but comes into his Old City studio to meet clients. When I met him he was designing a tree-of-life tattoo for a group of Chaldean Catholics that were due to arrive later that evening. He himself is Coptic, but he says he has pilgrims of every kind. In the Jerusalem context, many Christians who would not otherwise get a tattoo get a tattoo. Looking at the historical record, alongside ethnographic observation and interviews with pilgrims, I have come to understand the Jerusalem tattoo as what is called an ‘evlogia’, a ‘blessing’. Evlogia are given in all sorts of contexts, but are usually — especially in pilgrimatic practice — associated with the body of a saint. A small bottle of oil, a piece of cloth, bread, the dirt from a grave: each of these may be evlogia—they are material traces given from the pilgrimage site to the pilgrim.

Evlogia are given – in the case of food – to nourish and strengthen them for the journey, or – in the case of blessed oil – to return with them home, allowing the physical presence of the pilgrimage site to stay with them as they return. Ancient near-eastern pilgrimage sites are also known for the physical demands (bowing, kneeling, crawling) that require the pilgrim (a *proskinitis*) to bow low in the effort to access the saint (cf Hahn 1997). These acts of veneration are also often highly intimate: laying on the tomb of the saint, repeatedly kissing the stone cover, or rubbing the icon and then touching the body at a site of illness. As the art historian Robert Ousterhout says, summarising the practices of European pilgrimage to Jerusalem, ‘Tactility and sensory contact were important aspects of the pilgrims’ experience as they gathered *enlogiai* (‘blessings’), both material and spiritual, from the sites they visited; physical contact was critical’ (2015: 96). It is my understanding that in this context, with a high volume pilgrimage, in the expectation of close, intimate, and lasting bodily contact with the saint, that tattooing grew as a common practice.⁹

But, while tattooing is common in contemporary Oriental Christianity (especially Ethiopian Orthodoxy), it is usually condemned in contemporary Eastern Christianity — it exists in Orthodox countries, to be sure, but usually in penal contexts¹⁰. However, as a growing practice in the US, Orthodox Christians are often getting tattoos done in an iconographic style. People are hesitant to call these tattoos icons for myriad reasons, often arbitrated by

⁹ It is possible that the breadth of Christian communities willing to be tattooed in Jerusalem is in part a result of the general ecumenical spirit of unity expressed by local Jerusalemite Christians (See for example the work of Georgios Tsourous [2015]). Particularly since the crusades the Levant has been a place of intimate contact between Christian traditions. The prevalence of tattooing amongst African Christians, particularly Copts and Ethiopians, for example, may have introduced it to Jerusalem. Wassim suggests that tattoos began for the purposes of identification, allowing Christians a means of showing religious affiliation in order to gain access into Churches. On the other hand, there is sufficient evidence of ancient tattooing practices across early Christian communities both in the Middle East and abroad (Gilbert 2000; Moberg 1924), though the rationale behind the practice is not always clear.

¹⁰ The most well known and best-chronicled set is probably that of the Russian practice, photographed and chronicled by Danzig Baldaev (Baldaev and Vasiliev 2009).

various views concerning icon production and the difference – if there is one – between an icon and a blessed one. I do not have time to go into that here, but people will say ‘I have St Gregory on my arm’ more quickly than to say ‘I have an icon of St Gregory on my arm’. The impossibility of the first being taken literally seems to afford a comfortable dexterity.

[INSERT IMAGE ROUGHLY HERE: ‘Figure 1: St Gregory the Dialogist (left) and St Christopher (right), both by Turbo. Photo courtesy of ‘Christopher’.’]

But what does it mean to have St Gregory on one’s arm? Taking St Gregory the Dialogist (Theologian) as his patron saint, a man, whom I will call Gregory, commits himself to a perpetual relationship with his patron. In writing about the experience of having his tattoo, Gregory points out that each morning he sees St Gregory in the mirror. As a left-handed author, Gregory placed St Gregory on his writing arm. The Dialogist was also an author, and is shown writing on a scroll. A ‘writer writing on a writer’s writing arm’—Gregory says. There is a certain embodied poetry in the choice of placement. It becomes part of Gregory’s body, but is a place of communion with the saint. The proskynitarion is taken from the wall and placed in the flesh.

I ask Turbo, Gregory’s tattoo artist, who is also a trained iconographer, about icons. I want to know what makes an image an icon. Is the tattoo an icon?

Turbo traces in his hand and says, ‘Icons are images that are special because of their line.’ The line, he says, is not something in nature, but something true about nature. I start to hear echoes of map and territory in my mind (Korzybski 2000; Bateson 1972). But Turbo is talking about something beyond simple representation. He goes on: The line is not the saint, but it is the means by which we commune with the saint. ‘The line is the interface,’

he says. ‘The interface?’ I ask, ‘Like that?’ I say, pointing to my iPhone. ‘Yes, exactly like that’, he says.

I point behind Turbo to a pencil line image drawn on sketch paper that is pinned to a tackboard on the wall of his basement studio. It is a preparatory sketch for an icon Turbo has been commissioned to paint¹¹; it is the outline of St Romanos the Melodist. It is being prepared for Gregory’s son, named for the sixth century hymnographer from Homs, Syria. ‘That sketch’, I ask, ‘is only line. Is that an icon? Is that an interface?’

He pauses. ‘No’, he says, ‘but it could be.’ It is not, only because it is unfinished; and, taken in the context of his style, it is not yet an icon. This reasoning by final cause, or maybe the question of intention, raises an interesting problem. The sketch is not an icon (only) because it is not finished.

I ask him about Gregory’s tattoo. ‘Is it an icon? Does it have a line?’ I say. ‘Yes’, he answers, ‘it has a line, but’ and here he refers back to an earlier exchange we had by email, ‘it is not named’. In Eastern Orthodox tradition, icons have written upon them the name of the saint. Turbo, however, does not write on his images in the flesh. He says that at first this was an instinct, and now he does so intentionally, but is not entirely sure of the implications. We talk through it together. Oriental Christian icons are, quite often, unnamed. In fact, the parish Turbo attends has a sizeable Ethiopian contingent; reflecting this, the parish uses a large number of Ethiopian icons in their (Eastern Orthodox) temple. Even without their name, however, these images are still regarded as icons. Oriental

¹¹ In many Anglophonic communities, especially in North America, icons are said to be ‘written’ not ‘painted’. This is the result of a Russian lexical distinction between painting (as a menial labor practice) and ‘writing’ which is said of art production, be it verbal or pictorial.

Orthodoxy is a tradition of images that never underwent the kind of iconoclasm of the 8th century Roman Empire. As such, it is a tradition of images that was never made dogmatic. This seems important, and in what I take to be a different kind of semiotic ideology (Keane 2007), Oriental Orthodox do not require the link of word and image in the way that Eastern Orthodox do.

Turbo tells me, however, that the flesh, which bares the mark, knows the name of the image. Gregory knows the image is St Gregory. The image and the line is matched with the name: held in the mind. The body and mind together hold the image as an icon: like two hands holding stable an artefact, each part holds half of the iconic elements. The flesh holds the image; the mind holds the inscription.

Maybe it is an icon.

But, if so, this can only be true until Gregory's death. When his soul leaves his body; when he faces the trials – be they toll booths or an initial judgement, on this Orthodox disagree – and is held account for his actions, his body—with an image, and only an image, of an unnamed saint writing on a scroll, will be washed, and shrouded. Prayers will be said to St Gregory. Gregory's body will be venerated as the icon it is seen to be, his son Romanos will, no doubt, help lower him into his grave. And the pigment in Gregory's arm will decompose even as does he. Gregory asks, though: 'In the resurrection, will the image endure? Will St Gregory see, and recognise himself on [my] arm?'

Renovating the body

This article starts with research into the interrelated tropes of the body, the church, and the icon as practiced in Orthodox Christianity. Pursuing the entanglement of these tropes

within the practices and anxieties around death and mortuary practice, the paper follows a path articulating the axiomatic meta-valuations around the dignity of the body as these influence decision making practices in burial custom and other body-related practices such as blood donation. Arriving at the topic of body modifications that, because of their role in the preservation of life in a dignified manner, find general approval amongst Orthodox Christians, the paper then turns to address the trope of iconography in greater detail in the context of a body modification that does not enjoy the same level of approval. In discussing the practices of iconography and tattooing a few relevant themes arise.

In the condemnation of tattooing there are two principle critiques. The first is related to how the respect for the body is highlighted and contrasted against the perceived degradation of the body-as-temple. Rather than preserving the temple in its natural beauty, tattoos, it is argued, blemish the purity of the body. In this sense, the borders of the body must be kept clean. The second critique is a temporal one: it portends that tattooing glorifies this-worldly material, to the implied loss of honour given to the eternal. Again this rationale can be seen within a discourse of bodily delimitations. The meta-value of 'things eternal' over 'things temporal' should, the argument goes, impinge upon the body practice, as the body itself will, following the resurrection, be eternal. As such, the core critiques levelled by Orthodox Christians against tattooing practices rest on spatial and temporal limitations to the body. How the temple should be treated, and what kinds of things done to the temple will endure past this age are seen to govern the bounded nature of what Orthodox Christians can and should do with and to their body.

These critiques also represent the body-as-icon and body-as-temple tropes. Within the network of related imagery sketched above, however, one would also expect a critique on the side of particle nature of body-as-ekklesia that focuses on the relational aspect of the

gathering, or the intersubjective dynamics of the church as a community. There is, in fact, such a critique. It runs as follows: Icons are to be respected. Any act of veneration given them is passed, as mentioned above, on to the represented saint. Likewise, however, any act of desecration of the icon is dishonourable to the saint – and dangerous to the person (see Calofonos 2008). As such there are taboos around iconography: icons are not hung in bathrooms, in Russian practice it is not uncommon to have curtains hung in front of icon corners in order to shield one's nakedness from the saint. What then happens if an Orthodox Christian wearing a tattoo of a saint falls into sexual sin? Their sin, this line of thought argues, is made two-fold—once for falling into error, once for desecrating a holy image. This relational sociability of being-with-icons rests, again, on the partability of the self as and within ekklesia. What happens to a part happens to the whole.

What must be highlighted, however, is that these cosmological axioms of temporal, spatial, and partable delimitations of the body-as-temple are found, too, in Turbo and Gregory's articulation justifying the religious tattooing practice.

Gregory asks if St Gregory will not recognise himself on his arm. This has profound implications. For Gregory, fully recognising the resurrection of the body, includes the real possibility that the icon – a permanent modification to the body – will endure into the resurrected body. The spatial and temporal boundaries of the body are understood to be such that the pigments' intrusion and fusion into the body will permeate the body past the boundaries of mortal death.

Similarly, the relational aspect of Gregory's contemplation of St Gregory's (self) recognition – that he might see himself on (in?) Gregory – suggests a very real sustained intersubjective relationship that is anticipated to endure past representation presence into

real presence. Even now, when Gregory sees St Gregory in the mirror each morning, that act of seeing positions Gregory in a devotional position in an otherwise (usually) intimate and solitary space. The blessing of being in a place of proskynesis becomes Gregory's each time he sees his reflection. The image of the Diologist is an evlogia, a blessing, in Gregory's life. This brings us back to the question of Jerusalem.

In discussing the practice of the Jerusalem tattoo, I propose that these tattoos as evlogia grew up as a local practice in response to pilgrimic need for enduring, material continuity with the sacred sites of the Holy City. No one, however, sees Kansas City as a particularly holy place. Why would evlogia tattoos grow up in a North American context? In the Jerusalem context, tattooing serves as a way for pilgrims to participate in an intimate bodily and physically demanding practice of veneration that provides enduring material benefit. Ousterhout (2015) also points out that, while most contemporary tattooing practice is outward facing, earlier Christian pilgrimic tattooing was done on places, such as the arm, that can be seen by the wearer. Rather than being for show, these tattoos are for personal devotion. There are very few situations in North America that allow for sensuous and costly bodily engagement with the holy. Devotional tattooing, however, allows exactly this.

Some readers might take issue with the conflation of an iconographically-styled tattoo within the practice of pilgrimic evlogia. But there are two points to consider. The first is that many of Turbo's clients do, in fact, journey a considerable distance to gain their tattoo. The night I arrived at his studio he was midway through inking a client up from Florida. The weekend before, a client had travelled down from Canada. In these cases, travel in order to participate in a 'tactile and corporeal' (Ousterhouse 2015: 97) devotional act is, indeed, an explicit part of the picture. The other aspect, however, is that the Greek word *proskinitis* (pilgrim) does not, as the English word does, imply travel. Jill Dubisch

(1995:77f), in her ethnography of the Tinos pilgrimage points out that *proskynima* (the set of proskynesis that a proskynitis does) refers broadly to the acts of veneration (prayer before icons, etc.) performed upon entering a church. The word indicates ‘one who bows’, and in that sense may be more aptly translated as ‘devotee’. The devotional tattoo, gained in honour of a saint, and prompting (through sight) devotional reflection on the saint, places the tattoo within this context of tactile and corporeal pilgrimage.

As such, the aesthetic choice to gain a Byzantine-styled tattoo is at the same time an ascent to the ethical commitment that detractors of Orthodox tattooing are seeking to preserve. Both side of the Orthodox debate on tattooing agree with the ethical commitment to the body as a bounded, holy, and enduring temple of the Spirit that deserves dignified treatment. What they disagree on is the acceptability of the aesthetics of pigmented augmentation.

What I hope to have sketched out here is the possibility that in the local context in the West, tattoos offer a bodily engagement with the saints as the ‘line’ of an icon is drawn into the flesh of an arm, hand, or back. This aesthetic practice of beautification, however, is also linked back to the trope of body-as-temple. As one freshly tatted Orthodox Christian told me: ‘Yes, my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and I just installed a new stain-glass window.’

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