

Reason, emotions and icons

■ When in the 4th century the Cappadocian Fathers of the Church, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great, paved the way for the development of the whole of Christianity, they did not share our modern distinction between reason and emotions. The modern distinction was drawn by René Descartes and created a chasm between us and the pioneers of Christianity, as well as our own Orthodox neighbours in the east. The researchers at the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) are following the traces right back to the turbulent childhood of Christianity.

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■ The painted icon is a natural consequence of the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers of the Church, in which it is the aim of man to be transformed into a being that has been made divine. Torstein Tollefsen, one of the participants in the project, seeks to portray apotheosised mankind in his icons (picture).

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The complicated landscape



“The word ‘landscape’ may seem worthless from the point of view of a classical scientific way of thinking, which requires that one should operate with clear and precise concepts. Yet on the other hand the concept recurs the whole time in professional and political debate. For this reason we’re now spending time on investigating the different meanings of the concept of landscape,” says Professor Michael Jones (pictured). ● Pages 4–5

“Curiosity creates the breakthroughs”



“It is the curiosity-driven basic research that brings about the great breakthroughs. Without curiosity people would still have been gathering berries and roots!” says Willy Østreng (pictured), who is about to take up the post of scientific director at the CAS. ● Pages 6–7



Tomas Hägg (left) is Professor of Classical Philology at the University of Bergen (UiB), while Jostein Børtnes is Professor of Russian Literature in the same place. They are in charge of the research project “Aesthetics and Cognition” at the CAS. (Photo: Bjarne Røsjø)

The past provides new pictures of our own time

The three Cappadocian Fathers of the Church, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Basil the Great, made enormous contributions in the 4th century to the development of the Christian church, but in our day and age most of what is known about them is written in the pages of oblivion. Professor Jostein Børtnes and Professor Tomas Hägg are heading an international research team who are working on bringing them to light again.

The Christian church underwent an intensive development after Constantine, the first Roman emperor to profess Christianity, stopped the persecution of the Christians and instead gave them the support of the state authority around the year 312 – 313 AD. In the early part of the 4th century intense and bitter theological conflicts raged both before and after the first Council of Nicaea, and during the latter part of the 4th century the Fathers of the Church from the Cappadocia area in present-day Turkey contributed to determining the future of Christianity right up to our days. This alone is a good enough reason for studying them.

“Particularly Gregory of Nazianzus may be

seen as a key to the Christian understanding of man (anthropology) and aesthetics,” says Professor Jostein Børtnes. “But perhaps the most important reason for studying Fathers of the Church like Gregory is that they can teach us a great deal about how human cognition has developed. Gregory, you see, was at one and the same time a theologian, philosopher, poet, rhetorician and emotionalist, and there lies much of the reason for the fact that many have turned up their noses at Gregory ever since the 17th century. The French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes (1596–1650) can take some of the blame for this turning up of noses, because he drew a distinction between emotions

and reason and changed people’s way of thinking.

Us and the others

“In the research project ‘Aesthetics and Cognition’ we don’t mean aesthetics in the modern sense of ‘the science of art’, but in an older and broader sense that brings in both sensual and emotional aspects. Aesthetics in this sense was very important in the development of the view of man in the first centuries of Christianity, and it was the contribution from Descartes that first led to the separation of rational thinking from aesthetic perception,” Jostein Børtnes explains. Descartes most

certainly made an invaluable contribution to the history of science, but the clear dichotomy between reason and emotions made it at the same time more difficult to understand those who were building the Christian church in the 4th century. Descartes also made it a little more difficult for us to understand other contemporary cultures, such as the Russians, for instance, and other orthodox Christians,” he suggests.

Russia is another place

“Russian literature around 1900 saw the development of an attempt at a critique of the West-European ontological tradition that builds on Descartes’ famous *Cogito ergo sum*: I think, therefore I am. The Russian philosopher and poet, Vyacheslav Ivanov, wrote a landmark essay in 1910, in which he instead formulated ontology in the author Fyodor Dostoyevsky in the words *You are, therefore I am*. This way of thinking places much more weight on social reciprocity than Descartes’ ontology,” explains Professor Børtnes.

You are, therefore I am creates links between people cutting across all the boundaries that go through our social existence, but only between those who are within the community. “This dialogic thinking was therefore incompatible with the totalitarian modernism that gained the upper hand in Europe in the first half of the 20th century. But dialogism cropped up again in the 1970s and played an important part in Russia as an inspiration for the policy of perestroika,” Professor Børtnes goes on.

The commitment of the Cappadocian Fathers of the Church thus holds some of the explanation for the fact that Russian culture, through its emphasis on the role of man in the Creation, is different from West-European culture. But we should above all remember the Fathers of the

Church because they insisted that man is created in God’s image, and they fought a hard struggle against the Arian theologians who rejected the essential likeness between the Father and the Son. The Cappadocian Triad gave mankind a much greater value than it had had before, and this is perhaps part of the reason that human rights are generally very highly regarded in modern Christian societies.

“The view that man is created in God’s image had great consequences for the Christian understanding of man. According to the Fathers of the Church, the Fall consisted in the fact that mankind lost its likeness with God, but with the incarnation of Christ there arose a new possibility for man to restore his likeness with God. This possibility of apotheosis gave mankind an enormous value – life was given a new meaning – that had not existed earlier,” Jostein Børtnes emphasises.

Pictures and cognition

Gregory of Nazianzus illustrated the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost in the image of three candles burning separately, but nevertheless with the same light. “When we are to study theological and anthropological thinking in the 4th century, we must take account of the fact that to people at that time imagination and thinking in mental images was a cognitive activity. There they were absolutely in keeping with modern neurologists, who have established that the human brain in subtle ways stores sensory impressions, words and musical impressions in the form of images,” says Professor Børtnes. This point of view may also be supported with a quotation from Albert Einstein, who was without any doubt one of the greatest theoreticians in the 20th century:

The words or language, as they are written or

spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be voluntarily produced and combined.

“It was not until the 18th century that the imagination was relegated to the world of art, while philosophy required that one should leave one’s imagination behind and move over into the world of pure thought. This separation is something we are struggling with in our modern society, but in the 4th century it did not exist at all. Descartes’ brilliant analysis of the nature of thinking meant that philosophy was directed at reaching objective truths, and this has even led to the fact that theology as well has become oriented towards reaching objective truths. This must be a case of getting hold of the wrong end of the stick,” states Jostein Børtnes, who instead views theology as the most creative of the non-natural-scientific sciences.

“Why is it so important to study the Cappadocian Fathers of the Church in our day and age?”

“Among other things because our culture is stuck with a self-centred view of a line of development that goes from a cultural cradle in Egypt or Mesopotamia, on to the Greek city state and the expansion of the Roman Empire, and then through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment up to our time. Here we are in Western Europe and North America, readily believing that we are sitting at the very peak of a development, but the others have also developed of course. The Fathers of the Church can inter alia help us to understand our neighbouring cultures in the East. But they were also suppliers of premises for the development of the whole of Christendom,” says Professor Børtnes.



A small high plateau between Gölcük and Güzelyurt with Kizil Kilise, the burial church of Gregory of Nazianzus. The church is from the early Byzantine period, and here his bones were kept right up to the end of the 19th century, when they were moved to Agios Grigorios at Güzelyurt, consecrated in 1896 (now a mosque). At that time there was still a large Greek population in Cappadocia. Later Gregory’s earthly remains disappeared in connection with the fact that in the 1920s all Greeks had to leave Turkey. (Photo: Jostein Børtnes)

Gregory of Nazianzus

■ Saint Gregory (c. 330–390) was born on a country estate near Nazianzus in Cappadocia, today Nenezi in Central Turkey. He went to Athens to study rhetorics c. 348, but left the city again in 359 and established himself as a hermit together with Basil. His father, Gregory the elder, ordained him to the priesthood against his will c. 362, and ten years later he accepted consecration to the episcopate of the provincial town of Sasima, a hole of a staging-post, according to Gregory, who never took up office there. The apex of his career was in 381, when the Emperor Theodosius made him bishop of Constantinople.

Gregory, also called Gregory the Theologian, is most famous for his commitment in the struggle against Arian heresy, but also for his theological sermons on the Trinity, his panegyric at the death of his friend Basil, and approx. 400 religious and autobiographical poems.

Clarifying the landscape

The oldest meaning of the word “landskap” in Scandinavia and the other Germanic-speaking countries refers to a *land* that is *skapt* (created) by human beings. Yet gradually the word has acquired so many different meanings, with both political and legal ripple effects, that there is a need for more detailed clarification. Professor Michael Jones is in charge of the research group at the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) that is investigating this more closely.

“The word ‘landscape’ allows for a host of interpretive possibilities, and may seem worthless from the point of view of a classical scientific way of thinking, which requires that one should operate with clear and precise concepts. But on the other hand the concept recurs the whole time in professional and political debate, and that means that we must take account of it. You see, it is in fact the case that reality is complicated!”, says Michael Jones.

“That’s why we’re spending time on investigating the different meanings of the concept of landscape,” he adds. Professor Jones is now in charge of the CAS research group *Landscape, Case Law and Justice*, which is among things to focus on the significance of statutes and customs for the way in which common resources in the landscape are shared, administered and used.

The Nordic landscape

Clarifying the concept of landscape means among other things that the researchers are investigating different types of relations between human beings and their physical surroundings, such as the meaning of law and justice. “The American researcher Kenneth Olwig has pointed out that there’s a separate Nordic concept of landscape of its own. In English usage the ‘landscape’ is something which is to a great extent found *outside* the human being, and which is most of all a beautiful view or an aesthetic experience that is to be administered and protected against changes. The Germanic ‘Landschaft’ concept, which also has significance in Scandinavia, may by comparison cover both the physical territory and a political unit with case law and legislation,” Professor Jones continues.



The towns are also a part of the landscape, says Professor Michael Jones. Most people will agree that the Academy’s building that houses the Centre for Advanced Study in Drammensveien in Oslo contributes to raising the aesthetic value of the urban landscape. (Photo: Bjarne Røsjø)

Scottish Sovereignty, Norwegian Customs

It is more than 500 years since the Orkney Islands and Shetland passed from Norwegian to Scottish sovereignty, but the islands are still marked by Norse Odal legislation that can be traced right back to the 13th century or earlier. Orkney and Shetland thus provide a rare example of the fact that the relationship between human beings and their landscape may change extremely slowly in certain respects.

“The Orkney Islands and Shetland were part of the medieval Norwegian realm right up to 1468, when they were mortgaged to Scotland in place of a dowry when the King of Scotland was to marry Princess Margaret of Norway. Not until the 17th century was Scottish law applied in the islands, but the Norse laws that regulated the right of land ownership have left traces right up to our own day,” Professor Jones relates.

The traces of the Norwegian land laws have survived both as a legal and a cultural phenomenon, and many inhabitants of Shetland and the Orkney Islands have an identity with its roots in both Scotland and Scandinavia. “Historical research has shown that *udal law* has its origin in customs and rules of law that can be traced back to the Norwegian land laws from the Middle Ages and the Norwegian King Magnus Lawmender’s Land Law from the 13th century. It’s very interesting indeed to see how the remains of the former Norwegian system have

survived in a process in which one legal system has been replaced by another,” says Michael Jones.

Conflict over the shoreline

The Norwegian land laws reveal themselves for example in the fact that the right of ownership of the shoreline and beach zone is regulated differently in Orkney and Shetland from the rest of Britain. “In Britain the principle is that the area between high and low water belongs to the state or the Crown, but in the early 1990s the Scottish Court of Session ruled that this area in Shetland belongs to the adjacent landowner. This goes back to a Norwegian principle that the landowner’s title extends right out to the underwater shelf,” Professor Jones explains.

The Norse legislation was again taken right up to the Court of Session in 1990 after a dispute concerning the right of ownership of the seabed in connection with the growing fish-farming

industry. “According to British law there’s no doubt that the Crown owns the seabed, and the Crown therefore sought to demand rent for the fish-farming installations. A group of fish-farmers in Shetland registered the fact that the Norwegian state could not demand rent in this way, and took the matter to court to test the principles. Incidentally they lost this particular case, because the Court of Session found that in this instance Scottish sovereignty took precedence over *udal law*,” says Michael Jones.

To digress briefly for a moment, the Norwegian mortgaging of the Orkney Islands and Shetland does come up from time to time, and some people have imagined that the islands could become Norwegian again if the mortgage were to be redeemed. But so far this has not happened – after all, there are limits to how much weight one can place on traditions and customs.

The Norse Odal legislation still puts its stamp on the Orkney Islands and Shetland, in spite of the fact that it is more than 500 years since the islands were transferred from Norwegian to Scottish sovereignty. (Photo: Helge Sunde, Samfoto)

“Human beings are to a much higher degree a part of the Nordic/Germanic concept of landscape and other concepts with a similar meaning. The Norwegian local community that is called a *bygd* shows this clearly: The word designates both a geographical area and the physical surroundings, but also the people who live there and the institutions,” he adds.

An international landscape

It is important to study the concept of landscape, among other things because it crops up in many legal and political connections, such as the right to use common land, or the rights of the Sami and other indigenous peoples in relation to other groups.

Furthermore the landscape often arouses strong feelings. A negative example was to be found in the German Nazis with their almost supernatural view of the ties between “Blut und Boden”. In reality, however, most landscapes are not only marked by the local inhabitants but also by impulses from the outside.

“In the autumn of 2002 the Norwegian Folk Museum opened a very interesting exhibition that showed how different groups of immigrants have made their mark on Norway and the Norwegian landscape from around the 16th century and up to the present day. Both the famous quays and the Church of St Mary in Bergen were built by German immigrants, and

■ The research group Landscape, Case Law and Justice is organised around three sub-themes:

- 1) The concept of the landscape seen in a historical perspective as an expression of law, justice and cultural practice with respect to how society regulates the use of land and appurtenant common resources.
- 2) The relationship between continuity and change in the landscape as a physical and cultural expression of human activities and institutions, with the emphasis on statutes and customs, in a historical and geographical perspective.
- 3) Consequences in terms of law and landscape of environmental policy measures to administer non-economic values relating to the landscape.

the distinctive architecture of the fantastic wooden mansions in Trondheim reflected the wealth of merchants who originally came from Schleswig-Holstein. Mining towns too, like Røros and Kongsberg, came under great German influence, while both Finnskogen in Southern Norway and Finnmark show building traditions that are partly of Finnish inspiration,” Michael Jones relates.

Increasing interest

Michael Jones is a professor of geography, but in addition to several geographers the Landscape Group at the CAS is composed of a legal historian, a sociologist and a landscape planner. There has been increasing interest in different aspects of landscape research in recent years, not least because the landscape may constitute the core of many conflicts between the local community and the central authorities, for example, or for that matter indigenous populations and other groups of the population.

“Which landscapes does Michael Jones appreciate most?”

“There are at any rate four landscapes I appreciate enormously. One of these lies in Southern England around Southampton, where I grew up. I’ve also become very fond of my fieldwork area in Finland, where I collected data for my doctoral dissertation, and in addition the Orkney Islands and Shetland have become a sort of common denominator for my Norwegian and British background,” says the Englishman who was given an appointment at The University of Trondheim, now NTNU (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) in 1975. “In Norway Røros is one of my favourite landscapes, among other things because the old mining town has a very exciting history that has left many traces behind it in the landscape,” says Professor Jones.



The Centre has been given a lift

“The Centre for Advanced Study has been given increased resources and is approaching a level on which we must be in order to be able to attract internationally leading researchers. The Centre was planned and established within very tight financial limits, but the last two Norwegian budgets gave us a significant increase in what we receive from the state,” says Ole-Jørgen Skog.

Scientific Director Ole-Jørgen Skog will be leaving the Centre for Advanced Study on 1 August 2003, and he is pleased that developments at the Centre have been favourable during the three years he has been at the helm. “One of the central projects was to ensure further improvement of the financial situation, and we’ve been so fortunate as to see that the politicians’ many fine words about investing in

research have to a great extent been kept as far as the Centre is concerned. With a total budget increase of nearly 60 per cent in the course of 2002 and 2003, we’re beginning to approach the level on which we’re supposed to be. So at last we’re in a position to see some real volume when it comes to the participation of leading international researchers,” says Professor Skog.

Knife-edge competition

An elitist research centre is completely dependent on attracting leading international researchers, but the competition in this area is tough. Good researchers can choose among many offers. “Therefore we must be in a position to offer them attractive financial conditions. But just as important is the fact that the quality of the Norwegian researchers at the Centre is outstanding, and it has been the whole time,” Professor Skog emphasises.

The Centre for Advanced Study was Norway’s first unadulterated commitment to elite research when it was established in 1992, and the

increased grants in 2002–2003 are connected with the fact that the principle of elite research has had its political breakthrough. “I’m not in the habit of speaking up for social differences, but when it comes to research, we must make an exception. This institution’s fundamental idea is to invest in the elite, and that’s how it must be if Norway is to bring forth the best research,” Ole-Jørgen Skog believes.

With an eye to the research front

Ole-Jørgen Skog is himself one of Norway’s most well known researchers on intoxicants and he is among other things a former head of the National Institute for Alcohol and Drugs Research. He is in the process of completing an international project on the relationship between alcohol consumption and accidents, and can pour cold water on the idea fostered by those who believe that it is good for the health to have a glass of wine now and again. “There’s been shown to be a statistical correlation between moderate alcohol consumption and a reduced

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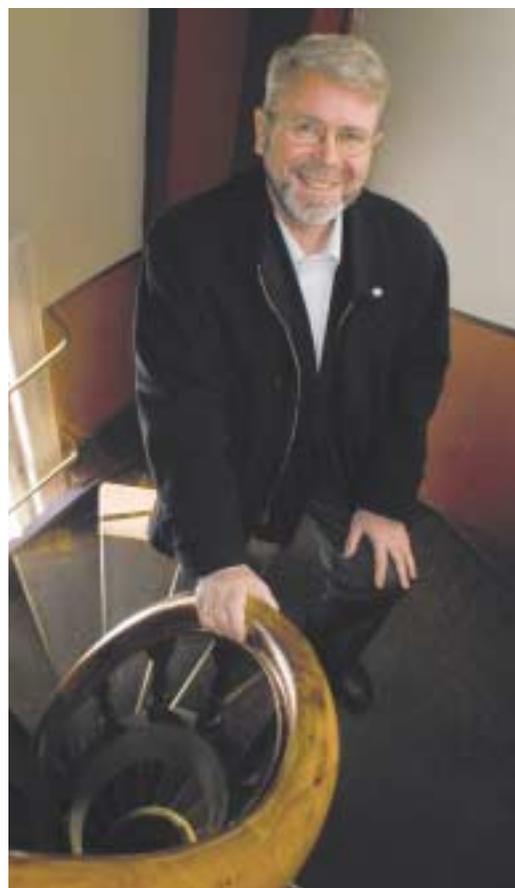
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Basic research is the foundation



“It’s curiosity that’s brought mankind where we are today,” says Willy Østreg, who is about to take up the post of scientific director at the CAS.

“Basic research has created the knowledge foundation on which the whole of society is built. Basic research is curiosity-driven, and without curiosity people would still have been living by gathering berries and roots!” says Willy Østreg.

Willy Østreg is famous for being among other things one of our foremost researchers on conditions in the northern areas, with more than 30 years of experience at the research foundation, the Fridthjof Nansen Institute (FNI), and for approximately 25 of those years he was the Director of the Institute. He is now taking the step from the northern areas to the CAS, where he will become the new scientific director on 1 August 2003. The transition feels quite natural, Willy Østreg explains: “You see, there are a number of connections between the FNI and the CAS, and one of them lies in extensive interdisciplinarity.”

The FNI has built further on the traditions inspired by Nansen, who was an extremely interdisciplinary researcher and always overstepped the borders within which he was working. “Today Nansen is most famous as a winner of the Peace Prize and as a polar researcher, but he was a zoologist by training and made most of his scientific discoveries within oceanography. This approach is also



“The Centre for Advanced Study has been given a lift and is on the right course. But there are still a lot of important tasks awaiting the Board and my successor,” says Scientific Director Ole-Jørgen Skog, who is now leaving the Centre.

risk of cardio-vascular diseases, but ‘the jury is still out on that one’ when it comes to the question of cause. But what is pretty certain, is that any benefit to health there might be in this area will be more than counteracted by increased

illness and mortality on account of accidents and somatic diseases. Increased alcohol consumption in a society unfortunately most often means increased mortality,” Professor Skog maintains.

A fantastic administrative staff

The three years at the Centre for Advanced Study have afforded few irritations and many joys. “I’ve had a number of top managerial tasks in the course of the years, but such a fantastic administrative staff as we have here, I’ve never seen the likes of. This bodes well for the future of the Centre,” says Professor Skog. There can be many exciting things ahead: “There are a lot of important tasks awaiting the Board and my successor. Among other things it will be important to find a form of co-operation with the 13 Centres of Outstanding Research that were established in Norway in the course of the autumn of 2002,” says Professor Skog.

“The time may also be ripe to evaluate the way in which the Centre operates. During its first ten years it has organised its research each year in three groups with from 6 to 8 man-years in each group. Similar centres abroad have placed more weight on individuals or smaller groups, and that is a form that may be relevant here too.”

Foundation of society

typical of the CAS, which always has three research groups from different disciplines. What’s more, each research group is often composed of people from several disciplines,” adds Willy Østreng.

The bedrock of society

The FNI is principally engaged in applied research within international management of the environment, energy and resources, but Willy Østreng strongly emphasises that the Institute owes a great deal to basic research.

“Applied research is pretty easy to ‘sell’, because it can be translated into practice and it acquires significance in the relatively short term. By comparison, basic research is more difficult to communicate, yet we know at the same time that it’s the curiosity-driven basic research that always ensures the major breakthroughs.

Without curiosity people would still have been gathering berries and roots!” he says.

“It’s curiosity that’s brought mankind where we are today, and it’s curiosity that’s going to take us still farther. It’s impossible to engage in good applied research without seeking support in advanced basic research. In this perspective basic research is the very bedrock of both applied research and of the rest of society,” says Willy Østreng.

Room for research

The post of scientific director at the CAS does

provide room for a certain amount of research activity, and this is a possibility Willy Østreng intends to take advantage of. He wants among other things to see how different superordinate values govern the behaviour of the state within international politics. “During the cold war, solidarity in alliances was one of the most important values, but these days many states have instead adopted values such as market liberalism and the development of democracy. There’s been little research, however, on what significance contextual values of this kind actually have. The present example of Iraq and the United States shows that even the most powerful states have a need for an anchoring of values in their foreign policy. In principle the USA doesn’t need to take account of anybody but itself, yet even so it made great efforts to legitimise an attack on Iraq through a resolution of the Security Council,” he points out.

The new head of the CAS is also planning a research project with the focus on methods of research in the area of intersection between disciplines. But it is the management of the CAS that will take most of his time in the weeks and months ahead. “We must be aware that it often takes many years before we can see the value to society of progress in basic research. The first computer, for example, was constructed as part of an experiment in natural science in 1946, and with hindsight we can see that that discovery has revolutionised society,” he says.

The Centre for Advanced Study

■ The Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters is an independent foundation with a board appointed by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters (NASL) and the Council for Universities and Colleges. Prominent researchers from Norway and abroad are invited for one-year stays to engage in research in the Centre’s premises in the basement and on the attic floor of the Academy’s villa in Drammensveien in Oslo.

Each year the Centre’s activities are organised in three research groups, each with from six to ten members. The work of each group is planned and organised around a common theme and headed by one or more outstanding researchers.

The groups are chosen from each of the following three areas:

- The Humanities
- Social Sciences/Law
- Natural Sciences/Medicine

The CAS is exclusively a basic research institution, where the participants have no other obligations than their own research. The Centre for Advanced Study is administered by a permanent staff of four and was officially opened on 1 September 1992.

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Icons are theology in colour

The icons that are characteristic of both churches and private homes in Russia and other countries with Orthodox churches, are often so beautiful that they could bring a stone to tears. However, these icons are more than beautiful objects, and for Russians religious pictorial art is more important than written theology. "The icons are theology in colour," explains the philosopher Torstein Tollefsen.

Torstein Tollefsen, who is an associate professor at the University of Oslo, is going to spend his time at the CAS studying divine activity (energeia) in the world picture of the Cappadocian Fathers of the Church and the Greek Father of the Church, Maximus the Confessor. Torstein Tollefsen is known as one of the very few painters of icons in Norway, with an art that is very closely related to his research.

"There's a close connection between the theology we're studying here and the forms of expression it acquired. The painted icon reflects

Torstein Tollefsen's interpretation of the Mother of God from Vladimir. The model for this icon is Byzantine, but it was taken to Russia and came to play an important part in religious life there. The fact that the icon bears the title "from Vladimir" does not mean that Mary was ever in that city, but that Vladimir plays a part in the history of the icon.

The icon has two striking aspects. The Virgin who has borne God is showing the way to



Christ with her hand. She is the Guide. At the same time we can see an embrace that bears witness to the mutual love between the Mother of God (the Mother of the God of Tenderness) and the incarnate God. In this there lies a deeper theological message. In spite of the Fall the human being, Mary, is able freely to follow God's will. She said yes to giving birth to God in the flesh (as a

human being), and thereby showed that God's image in man had not been completely destroyed, at least not in her.

the view of mankind in Byzantine Christendom, in which it is the aim of man to be transformed into a being that has been made divine. It's this transformed or apotheosised mankind that is painted in the icon," he says.

Torstein Tollefsen is not quite sure whether the Cappadocian Fathers of the Church in the 4th century used icons of the kind we know today, for little or nothing has been preserved. Nevertheless, texts of sermons have been preserved in which it seems that the preacher is standing by a painted picture. "But the more I read about the Cappadocian Fathers, the more I'm convinced that the painted picture is a natural consequence of the type of theology they had," he adds.

The icons show the purpose

"The main motif in this theology is the incarnation, that is to say that God became man. This makes possible a depiction of the divinity as a human being, and in the next instance it was the moment for depictions of martyrs and saints. The basic creed of the Eastern churches is that the material world is good, but that the present state of affairs is miserable because of the fall of man. However, this miserable state of affairs is not final, and the icons show in many ways what Nature is to become again. They show the very purpose of existence," he points out.

Torstein Tollefsen himself converted to the Orthodox Church at a mature age, and he paints icons as a natural part of this transition. "There are no watertight divisions between my own activity as a believer, as a researcher or as what one may call an artist. I paint the theology I am trying to understand, taking my point of departure in the fact that I feel a strong urge to express myself aesthetically," Torstein Tollefsen explains.

■ Torstein Tollefsen (the picture) took his doctoral degree in philosophy with a dissertation on the Greek Father of the Church, Maximus the Confessor (580–662). While other Christians see Christ as a religious preacher or the saviour of man, Maximus went further and perceived Christ as the origin of the whole of Nature and the world. Maximus' thinking is little known in the Protestant churches, but has had great significance for the Orthodox Church right up to our own time.



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