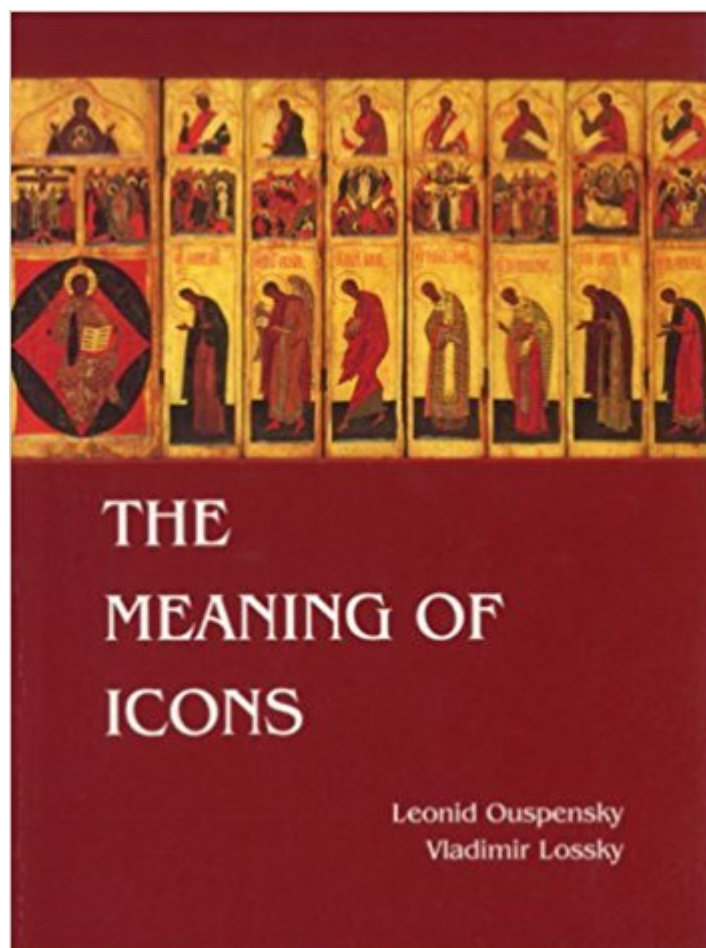


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# The Meaning Of Icons



## Synopsis

Includes 160 pages of text with drawings, 13 black and white and 51 full color plates. It is linen-cloth and paper bound. In the last decades the art of icons has gained increased attention. Once icons were passed over by the art critics, or at most classified as popular art, although painters such as Matisse or Picasso went to Russia especially for the sake of studying this art. Most recently many books have been published on icon painting. Yet the present work is the first of its kind to give a reliable introduction into the spiritual background of this art. The nature of the icon cannot be grasped by means of pure art criticism, nor by the adoption of a sentimental point of view. Its forms are based on the wisdom contained in the theological and liturgical writings of the Eastern Orthodox Church and are intimately bound up with the experience of contemplative life. The introduction into the meaning and the language of the icons by Ouspensky imparts to us in an admirable way the spiritual conceptions of the Eastern Orthodox Church which are often so foreign to us, but without the knowledge of which we cannot possibly understand the world of the icon. "It is not the purpose of the icon to touch its contemplator. Neither is it its purpose to recall one or the other human experience of natural life; it is meant to lead every human sentiment as well as reason and all other qualities of human nature on the way to illumination." "The entire visible world as depicted in the icon is to foreshadow the coming Unity of the whole creation, of the Kingdom of the Holy Ghost." The theological justification of the icon was derived by the Seventh Ecumenical Council from the fact of the Incarnation of God. God became human for the elevation and deification of Man. This deification becomes visible in the saints. The Byzantine theologian often sets the calling of an icon painter on an equal level with that of a priest. Devoted to the service of a more sublime reality, he exercises his objective duty the same way as the liturgical priest. The "spiritual genuineness" of the icon, the cryptic, almost sacral power to convince, is not alone due to accurate observation of the iconographic canon, but also the ascetic fervor of the painter. A very interesting section of the technique of icon painting is followed by the main part of the book, in which both authors describe the most important types of icons. Apart from a detailed description of the icon screen (iconostas) of the Russian Church, 58 types are explained with the aid of an equal number of illustrations, amongst which there are alone 10 various representatives of the virgin. Special mention is due to 51 icons reproduced in their complete colorful splendor. The section of subjects made in order to reveal the main features of Orthodox iconography was naturally limited to the examples available outside of Russia. But this not in the least diminishes the value of the book; on the contrary, it led to the reproduction of many beautiful icons which had never been published before or had been unknown to wider public. A considerable number of museums and private collectors in Europe and America

spontaneously placed their collections at the disposal of the authors.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Among the many books on icons, this is one of the oldest still in print. Why has it become a classic? Because it was written by one of the greatest twentieth century theologians, Vladimir Lossky, and by one of the greatest 20th century iconographers, Leonide Ouspensky who spent the whole of his artistic life in France painting icons and frescoes. Their approach is unique not only because of their deep experience of the Orthodox faith, but also because of the way they decided to describe the colour prints reproduced in this volume. What we have here is a superb commentary in the form of selection of poetry from the feasts during which these icons are placed in the middle of the church. Much of this Byzantine hymnography has no parallel in the West. It is what is heard in the eastern Christian church throughout the liturgical year which this volume beautifully illustrates both in word and image. The authors' feeling for the uplifting prayer of which icons play such a vital part is genuine and rarely found in any other book about the iconographic tradition. All Christians and many non-Christians will appreciate their respectful presentation of the revelation of God to man as it is presented in this book.

About icons and their meaning I already had (and read) a lot in the Russian language, but until now I didn't have content and illustrations in one hand. That's for me the meaning of the Meaning. It is short, gives the theological and canonical information about the role of the icon in Eastern Orthodoxy from inside, the themes are worked out and clearly arranged, the illustrations are big and

beautiful. So, I am very glad that I sought for it and bought it.

This book invites readers with and without knowledge of icons. Its size, method, and delivery resemble art books at twice the cost. Initial publication date in 1952 occurred when both authors had achieved mature productivity as icon writer (Ouspensky) and theologian (Lossky) while ex-patriots in Paris. Sampling of Russian icons in this text from the 16th-century forward revealed many treasures of late Byzantium reinterpreted by Christian faith in Russia. Many of these icons might have been erased by time or ideologues had the authors' combined experience and memory not captured them here. But the book is more than archeological artifact. It cannot be dismissed as a preservationist project. Rather, faith and icon extend a splendid view of the new world transformed by the likeness of the heavenly Creator. Spectacular views of the new world await in what I consider a master-text by Ouspensky and Lossky.

This is a great classic for those who wish to know more about icons, their writers, styles and other information. This is not a "sit and read" casual book for enjoyment, (although it is if you are in iconography) but a serious and reverential study of icons by a well renowned scholar and Orthodox believer.

This is a book every icon painter should have on her bookshelf. A very good reference work you can consult many times.

Great!

Bought as a gift. The recipient was clearly delighted with the book.

Great book and record of the meanings of Icons.

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