

Images and Icons

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Some of the world's greatest art treasures are based on religious themes, with Jesus Christ being the theme and object of many paintings, sculptures, and icons throughout the ages. The cross has become a universal symbol of Christianity, and the crucifix being a passionate symbol among the Catholic and Orthodox religions.

The Cross as a Universal Christian Image or Icon

The cross is an outward sign of faith among many Christians; however, one must consider what the cross really represents. Does it represent the crucifixion of Christ only, or his ministry as well? Can the cross capture the suffering of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? How does the cross represent the resurrected Christ and his reigning on the right hand of God today? Does our Heavenly Father want us to remember the cruel instrument the cross was to his son, or does he want us instead to focus on the living Christ and his presence in our life today?

How Should we Remember Jesus Christ?

Christians may do well to consider if the cross should be a symbol of faith in Jesus Christ, or rather should Christians choose to quietly revere his suffering and resurrection in their hearts and use life examples and actions as an outward expression of faith? Covenants are made to take upon one's self the name of Christ at baptism, and the

baptized life should demonstrate the depth of keeping that covenant and their love for the Savior.

Robert E. Wells of the Seventy addressed the issue of icons: "We are Christians because, like the early Christians, we have no graven images or any other objects of idolatrous worship. (See Ex. 20: 4-6.) Nor do we feel that it is proper to make medals, relics of ancient times, icons, or even the cross or other man-made objects part of our worship of the true and living God. Of course we adorn our parks and our buildings with statues and we display pictures of the Savior and others in prominent places, but we attach no undue religious significance to such things made by man" (Elder Robert E. Wells; "We are Christians Because...; Ensign, January 1984).

The apostle Bruce R. McConkie writes, "All the idols and icons and images combined, since the world began until the end of time, will never have power to cleanse and perfect a single human soul" (Bruce R. McConkie, "The Lord God of the Restoration," Ensign, Nov 1980, 50).

What if no Religious Images or Icons are used?

On the subject of the absence of crosses and other such symbols in LDS buildings the prophet Gordon B. Hinckley wrote: "Following the renovation of the Mesa Arizona Temple some years ago, clergy of other religions were invited to tour it on the first day of the open house period. Hundreds responded. In speaking to them, I said we would be pleased to answer any queries they might have. Among these was one from a Protestant minister. Said he: 'I've been all through this building, this temple which carries on its face the name of Jesus Christ, but nowhere have I seen any representation of the cross, the symbol of Christianity. I have noted your buildings elsewhere and likewise find an absence of the cross. Why is this when you say you believe in Jesus Christ?'"

"I responded: I do not wish to give offense to any of my Christian colleagues who use the cross on the steeples of their cathedrals and at the altars of their chapels, who wear it on their vestments, and imprint it on their books and other literature. But for us, the cross is the symbol of the dying Christ, while our message is a declaration of the Living Christ."

“The Protestant minister then asked: ‘If you do not use the cross, what is the symbol of your religion?’ I replied that the lives of our people must become the most meaningful expression of our faith and, in fact, therefore, the symbol of our worship.” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Symbol of Our Faith,” Ensign, April 2005)

Conclusion

One should not criticize those who have a preference for crosses, crucifixes, and other physical symbols of faith—either worn on their body or displayed in their home. Individuals should use whatever means is most effective in their own lives to remember and revere Jesus Christ. There are millions of Christians of all denominations who love to visit Catholic Churches around the world and admire the astounding beauty of the décor and feeling of reverence that such décor promotes.

At the same time, one can’t help but appreciate the simplicity of churches that do not have such décor and instead focus on the living Savior and promote a reliance on one’s own faith in developing a more intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Imagine how wonderful our world would be if all Christians made sure the lives they led were the key outward sign of our faith in Jesus Christ as opposed to a cross on a piece of jewelry.

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