

## **The Icon Art within the Orthodox Doctrinal and Canonical Limits**

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### **Abstract:**

The Orthodox iconography implies the existence of canonical ordinances and limits, without which the icon loses its meaning and significance for the liturgical life of the Church believer. The canonical limits must be based on the doctrinal markers of the Church that consecrate the icon as a witness to the mystery of the incarnation, but also as a window permanently open to eternity. The canonical and doctrinal iconography of the Church is truly an art, a liturgical art that cannot be separated or isolated from its ecclesial context, meaning the Holy Scripture and its content, rich in doctrine and spirituality. The Byzantine manuscript of the icons' theology made it possible to eliminate the risk of the emergence as an art of the so-called "artistic existentialism", where the imagination makes room for hallucination and delirium, in order to transform the sacred art of the icon into a "rough art", as a primitive characteristic of mental illnesses who live their religiosity in the form of "mystical nightmares", in an absolute primitivism.

### **Keywords:**

Icon, art of the icon, orthodox iconography, sacred art, canon, doctrine, orthodoxy, Church, artistic existentialism, raw art, primitive art, mystical nightmare.

### **I. Introduction**

In the Orthodox tradition, the icon is part of the liturgical celebration. It is a liturgical art that cannot be isolated from its ecclesial context: The Scripture and its extensive hymnodic review, rich in doctrine and spirituality.

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Images (icons, *eikon*, in Greek, means religious image) were spread very early in the Christian world: catacombs art is known, funeral art full of Resurrection joy. But it has borrowed techniques from Roman and Hellenistic art of the time and merely christened them through a game of signs and symbols. Only starting with centuries IV-V did the icon include the symbol of the countenance, when Trinitarian theology included the being in communion.

However, a trend hostile to images persisted in Christianity, nourished by the Old Testament prohibitions and the fear (sometimes justified) of idolatry, of dematerialized spiritualism or insistence on pan-human character, and therefore impossible to be depicted, of Christ.

The crisis broke out in 726 and continued until 843. Energetic, malicious emperors start fighting against monasticism. This, indeed, seemed to limit their power and undermine social life. Being prophecy about the Kingdom of God, testimony about a crucified Lord, the monastic ideal is engraved in the icon. Extensive secularization policy, supported at the same time by the army and spiritualist theologians, at that moment, became iconoclasm.

The crisis has allowed the foundation and purification of icon veneration. Against purely speculative thinking about the transcendent, the Church emphasizes that the living God transcends His own transcendence in order to discover Himself with a human face. The icon, par excellence, that of Christ, is justified by the incarnation, especially since the Son is not only the Word but also the (consubstantial) Image of the Father, “the source of divinity”. “Once, St. John Damascene wrote, the incorporeal and formless God was not portrayed at all. But now that God was manifest in the flesh, and dwelt among men, I make the icon of the seen countenance of God”<sup>1</sup>. For just as the Word was made flesh, the flesh became Word. St. John Damascene rejects the objection of useless matter stressing that grace, in Christ, permeated matter and rescued its potential sacramentality: “I do not worship matter but I worship the Creator of matter, Who made Himself matter for me [..] I honor and respect the matter through which my salvation was perpetrated, as one full of God’s work and grace.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, “because *the One Who exists in the image of God, took the countenance of a servant*, [...] portray him in icons and place Him Who received to be seen, for contemplation”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Saint John Damascene, *Cele trei tratate contra iconoclaștilor (The Three Treaties Against Iconoclasts)*, Romanian translation of D. Fecioru, Institutul Biblic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 49

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49-50.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44.

This is a continually repeated statement from St. Dionisius the Areopagite to St. Theodor the Studite: in Christ, the invisible is seen, for Mystery is also Love. This is an antinomy systematized by St. Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century, for whom God, completely inaccessible – essence or super-essence – fully makes Himself participating to His “work”.

Hence the importance the Transfiguration and the *Achiropiita*<sup>4</sup> receive in the icon theology.

“Jesus took Peter, James and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain (the Tradition said: Mount Tabor) and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light” (Matthew 17,1-2). Another version says: “as snow” and Luke states: “His robe became white and glistening” (9.29).

When a faithful, monk or layman, does not matter, receives the service of an iconographer, the priest pronounces upon him the essential officiation of Transfiguration. Icon theologians never ceased to comment on the Gospel texts dedicated to this episode: “What is more disturbing, Anastasius the Sinaite would say, than see God with the face of a man, his face shining stronger than the sun?”<sup>5</sup>

In Christ, moreover, time repeats itself and the icon involves remembrance and foreshadowing, a kind of vision that guides the artist’s hand. “Christ Himself left the Church His image,” Saint George of Cyprus would write when the iconoclast crisis began. The remembrance of this image – the Holy Face – is suggested by two significant legends: in the West, the one about Veronica’s veil (from *vera*: “true” – in Latin, and *eikon*, “image” – in Greek), who would have wiped the countenance of Jesus on the way of the Cross; In the East, the *Mandylion*, a veil that Jesus would have willingly faced his image on, required by the King of Edessa, Abgar, being sick. The fact is that *something* has been discovered in Edessa in the sixth century and was brought in a triumphal procession to Constantinople in 944, *something* that specified in detail the representation of Christ. A *sudarium*, perhaps, of which meaningful relation to it we do not know about – challenged today – of Turin<sup>6</sup>. However, the image of Christ is *acheiropoietos*, “not made by human hands”, as Virgin Mary gave birth remaining Virgin, because the hand of the iconographer, preparing by fasting and prayer, is guided by the Holy Spirit<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> About the significance of the Transfiguration Icon, see Vasile Manea, *Întâlnirea cu Dumnezeu exprimată în icoana Schimbării la Față (Meeting with God Expressed in the Transfiguration Icon)*, Patmos Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Omilie la Schimbarea la Față (Homily to Transfiguration), PG 84: 1376.

<sup>6</sup> For the relationship between the Mandylion and the Turin Cloth, see Vasile Manea, *Icoana lui Hristos cea nefăcută de mână (the Acheiropoietos)*, Patmos PH, Cluj Napoca, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Giorgio di Pisidia, *Poemi*, in “Studia Patristica et Byzantina”, 1960, p. 91.

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The prohibition of *Exodus* and *Deuteronomy* to make images was not removed only for Christ but also for His Mother and His “friends”, members of His Sacramental Body. Man created in the “image” of God is predestined “to be conformed to the image of His Son” (*Romans* 8.29), transformed “into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (*II Corinthians* 3.18). He must unceasingly renew “according to the image of Him who created him” (*Colossians* 3.10). Grounded on the Eternal Son Incarnation, the icon multiplies by sanctifying man in the Holy Spirit; icons of the Mother of God and of the Saints anticipate the final transfiguration: When Christ Who is our life appears, then we, also will appear with Him in glory. (cf. *Colossians* 3.4).

## II. Icon Art Landmarks from Christian-Orthodox Perspective

In the fourth century, once with the inauguration of Constantinian era, a new period for the Church began. She came out of the forced seclusion she had been before into, and widely opened her doors to the ancient world. The influx of new converts required larger places of worship and a new kind of preaching, more direct and explicit. The symbols of the first centuries, destined to a small number of initiates who understood them, were less clear to these new converts. For this reason, during the centuries IV and V, large churches make room for monumental paintings in the shape of historical cycles representing events of the Old and New Testament. St. Constantine built churches in Palestine even in the places of evangelical events. Also in this period, most of the major feasts of the Church and their iconographic compositions are fixed and they still exist today in the Orthodox Church. However, in the sixth century their series is complete, because we find them on the famous ampoules<sup>8</sup> of Monza (not far from Milan) and at Bobbio. These silver vessels decorated with scenes from the Gospel were offered in the year 600 to Theodelinda, Queen of the Lombards (625 t), and is a very valuable document to us. Some scholars argue that the evangelical scenes engraved here reproduce Palestinian mosaics of churches built by Constantine and Elena. Other scholars are more cautious: “It is more reasonable to say, writes A. Grabar, that their farthest models remain unknown to us for the moment.”<sup>9</sup>

Dating from centuries IV and VI, these recipients are particularly useful because they offer representations of more feasts, thereby confirming our old iconography dedicated to these holy days. Indeed, some of them show us iconography already fully developed, the same as that used today in Orthodox icons.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> We speak of some silver mini-recipients, in the shape of a gourd.

<sup>9</sup> A. Grabar, *Les Ampoules de Terre Saitite*, Paris, 1958, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> One of these ampoules even has seven representations on it: that of the Annunciation, Mary’s visit to Elisabeth, Christ’s Birth, Baptism, Crucifixion, Myrr Women at the grave and Christ’s Ascent to Heaven.

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The change that occurred in the fourth century in the life of the Church was not only external: this era of triumph was also one of great temptation and of great trial. People who would go into the Church brought with them all anxiety, all doubts and misunderstandings, which the Church had to dissipate and appease. This new contact between the Church and the world could altogether be characterized by an outbreak of heresy and by a great upsurge in inner Christian life. If by then the pillars of the Church were especially martyrs, at the moment they were theologian Fathers and holy ascetics. This is the age of the great saints such as Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Anthony the Great, Macarius of Egypt, Mark the Hermit, Hermit Isaiah and many others. The Empire became Christian, the world sanctified little by little, but just out of this world on its sanctifying way, out of this Christian empire fled those who would go into the desert.

The desert attracts not because it would be easy to live there, not to escape the mundane hardships, but rather to leave the mundane welfare, the honors of a society that claimed not to contradict Christianity. In the late fourth century, all Egypt was dotted with monasteries where thousands of monks lived. Pilgrims came here from everywhere, both Asian and Western. The experience of the ascetic fathers propagates and their writings spread throughout the Christian world. Since that time, theoretical theology and practical theology, namely the Church teaching and the hermits' vivid experience become the living spring that feeds the sacred art, which guides and inspires it. This art is facing the need, on the one hand, to convey dogmatically formulated truths, on the other hand, to share the experience of these truths, the spiritual experience of the saints, the vivid Christianity in which doctrine and life are one. All these need to be transmitted, not to small groups, as before, but to masses of faithful people. Therefore, the Fathers of this time dedicated great importance to the teaching role of art. In the fourth century, the golden age of theology, a large number of firsthand Christian authors, in their argument on images<sup>11</sup> refer to it as an important reality and whose role is considerable. Thus, St. Basil the Great grants painting a persuasive attribute greater than his own words. After giving a whole sermon in memory of the holy martyr Varlaam, he concluded, saying he did not want to talk about this great martyr in words, but that gives way to a more elevated language, "stronger trumpets of teachers": "exalt now, famous painters of the great exploits of fighters, and adorn with the colors of your art the crowned one, described so darkly by me! Let me be defeated

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<sup>11</sup> Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian (especially the second homily on the Son), Saint John Chrysostom (Homily III to The Colossians), Saint Gregory of Nyssa (Homily on the Son and the Holy Spirit Divinity, or the one on the holy martyr Theodorus), Saint Cyril of Alexandria (homily to Emperor Theodosius) and others.

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by the icon you will make to his valiant deeds! Let me be happy today, although defeated, of a victory that has the skills of your own! [...] Let me see the fighter painted in your icon brighter! Let the devil now cry, hit by the valiant deeds of the martyr depicted by you! Let them be shown again their burnt and victorious hand! Let Christ be painted in the icon, the Primate of battles"<sup>12</sup>.

It's amazing to show, the way Paul Evdokimov does, that the council of Trent (1545 – 1563) and the Council of Moscow (1551), take place in the same era, and reach conflicting conclusions regarding the nature of sacred art. While the Eastern Church iconography prefers two-dimensional surface, more open to the mystery, the Christian West, more liberal, leaves the door open to an easy solution because of realism, namely the statue in three dimensions, more individual and autonomous<sup>13</sup>.

### III. Canonical and Doctrinal Features of the Orthodox Icon

The *raison d'être* of icons is to serve both God and man. The icon is a window through which the people of God, the Church, contemplates the kingdom of

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<sup>12</sup> Saint Basil the Great, *Omilia 17,3 (Homily 17,3)*, Romanian translation of D. Fecioru, (PSB 17), Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al BOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1986, p. 523.

<sup>13</sup> Any art is a system of expression, a special language whose elements refer to meaning, similarly to words in a phrase making reference to thinking. To the limit, in the case of the icon as well, the content, the mystical message expresses things beyond. Its light clarifies the world destiny, evokes the eschatological union between earth and heaven. By its empirical imperfection, the icon suggests perfection in filigree, it reminds man he is the image of God, angel in body and heavenly being through his original vocation. The current sacred art crisis is not aesthetical but religious. If there still exists, nowadays, a theological fundamentalism that makes the *Bible* a *Coran* and, at the other extremity, an exegetic scientism that debunks it to the limit, it means there is a crisis of contemporary world development, its sensitivity still looking for an equilibrium. In the two cases, generalized iconoclasm, the icon refute comes from the gradual loss of liturgical symbolism and from patristic vision abandoning. The realism of being and its transfiguration makes room for the aesthetic "beauty" in which the mystic message is erased before the purely narrative element. Art loses the organic connection between content and form and, similar to knowledge, it separates from mystical contemplation and is obstructed in the night of breakages. Lacking former sacred art, one no longer finds art works with religious content. Profane art follows optical laws throwing the snare on things, coordinating them in order to create a homogenous vision of things in this world. Its principles are a function of decayed world, of its exteriority, of its separation, distance and isolation. In order to express itself, it fundamentals the unit of action, therefore the time snare; the perspective unit, therefore the space net; an *a priori* grid interposing between eyes and things. It is a "point of view", full of optical illusion, useful for current life, but which is not the total vision, that of the "Dove Eye". The artificial profoundness of the picture, accomplished through the optical game of lines that by converging distance themselves, is the most weird cunningness.

Iconographs do not ignore any "technique", nor even the most modern; however, they do not make it the condition of their art. Iconographic art is wholly inaccessible to material reality, the way it presents itself to common optics; it imposes the audience its own principles, shows the audience its real vision. It is an entirely spiritual art, a huge culture that makes one feel, almost "touch" on the fire of things". (Evdokimov, p. 189-197)

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God; and, for this reason, every line, every color, every feature of the face makes sense. The iconographic canon formulated over centuries is not a prison that deprives the artist of his creative enthusiasm, but is an authentic preservation of what is represented. Herein lies the tradition. When St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John Chrysostom, St. Seraphim and all the other saints are painted, we want to make sure that they were painted in the tradition of the Church, as the Church knows them and keeps them in her living memory. Therefore, we have no reason to change the face of any saint or any of their characteristics, garment type or color. Also, there is not the slightest reason to change the style of representation, unless we found a better way to express through painting a countenance that became a vehicle body of the Holy Spirit. The Romans were able to devise the right formula we have known so far, all other attempts of expressing the idea of transfigured body failed ... As long as the Orthodox cult is fundamentally Byzantine, it would be inconceivable that his visual art be different (Extract from a conference)<sup>14</sup>.

By way of Council spread words and bishop mission, the Church watches over the authenticity of “divine art”. It “was not generated by painters, but, on the contrary, represents a confirmed rule and a fine tradition of the Church”<sup>15</sup>. The Council in *Trullo* or *Quinisext* of 692 formulates the rules<sup>16</sup>, thus providing a safe criterion for judging the value of iconographic images. The Council of a Hundred Heads of 1551 requires bishops to keep watch “each in his diocese with untiring care and attention that iconographs refrain from delusions and follow tradition ... The one whose charism God took away should be stopped from painting icons ... the Icon of God must not be entrusted to those who disfigure and dishonor it”<sup>17</sup>. Craft and talent, although necessary, are far from being enough. A third condition was required: life in *holiness*, a soul purified by asceticism and prayer and doubled by a contemplative mind<sup>18</sup>.

The Seventh Council formulated the Canon that decided on honoring icon. Dogmatic explanations are peppered throughout the Church Fathers teaching and they are reflected from the icon itself, from its luminous track, from its amazing life in which dynamic tradition can be pursued step by step. In it, Christ, with different elements of Church life (liturgy, sacraments, patristics, icon), comments on his own words.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Quenot, *Icona fereastră spre absolut (the Icon, a Window to the Absolute)*, Enciclopedică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1993, p. 47-51

<sup>15</sup> Mansi XIII: 252 C.

<sup>16</sup> Canons 73, 82, 100. The Council interdicted after the Incarnation “shapes and shadows”, the Lamb, the Fish etc., that must make room for the human countenance of Christ.

<sup>17</sup> Duchesne, *Le Stoglav*, Paris, 1920.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Arta icoanei. O teologie a frumuseții (The Icon Art. A Theology of Beauty)*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1993, p. 185-189.

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*Martirum signum est maxime caritatis.* The icon itself is a martyr and bears testimony of a baptism of blood and fire. During the relentless persecution exerted by the iconoclasts, the blood of martyrs was mixed with the remains of icons, which are splashes of light. Patriarch Germanus stated at his dismissal, drawing his pallium “and the authority of a Council you cannot, O *king*, change, you cannot change anything about faith.” Pope Gregory II says, in his turn, to Leon Isaurian: “The dogmas of the Church are not your problems ... leave your follies”. When speaking about the icon, it is not all about simple illustrations. United in the same tradition during those times, the West and East rose together against heresy, because tackling on the problem of the icon, dogma was touched upon, the entire economy of salvation was threatened. Veneration of the Gospel, the Cross and the Icon represents a whole together with the liturgical mystery of the presence within the depth of the chalice proclaimed by the Church: “Our doctrine is in agreement with the Eucharist; it is confirmed”, said St. Irenaeus.

If any art worthy of this name never seeks to duplicate reality, but tends to reveal its meaning, to decipher its secret message, to grasp its *logos*, to suggest the highest vocation of the freedoms that animate it, iconography, through its colours, belongs, clearly, to pneumatology. Therefore, St. John Damascene also assigned to the icon the presence of the Holy Spirit.

“In Him was life”, says the beginning of the Gospel of John (I.4). The Spirit – Life – from the very eternity was inside the Word. Once with the Epiphany, He comes down from the sky in the image of a Dove and stops, places Himself over Jesus. In His epiphanies, He is a movement “towards Jesus” towards the Lamb, to make manifest the divinity of Jesus. He “goes back” in Christ, to proclaim “the former”: His breath bears the word of Christ makes it heard, confirms it, gives it breath of life and eschatological dimension: “Drinking from the Spirit, we drink Christ”, says St. Athanasius admirably. The Spirit makes us enter into Christ; in Christ, we fully meet the Spirit and get inspired by Him in order to encompass the ultimate meaning of Revelation.

The theology of the Fathers shows the special importance of *epiclesis* exceeding the liturgical plan of the Eucharist, making universal and enabling spiritual sight of the divine power of revelation and manifestation of the invisible. He is the one Who speaks in us, with us “*Abba*, Father” in order to allow us to pray, *Abba* Father, send your Holy Spirit to be able to say “Lord Jesus” and to be able to contemplate His face too, and through His deified humanity, “glass candlestick”, see the Hypostasis of *God-Man*<sup>19</sup>.

The icon also belongs to the biblical theology of Name. God’s name is His praying icon; it cannot be “uttered without reckoning” for God is present in His

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *op.cit.*, p. 185-189.



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name. “the Prayer of Jesus” is rooted in this biblical notion. In the rite of sanctification, “calling” the icon: “This image is the icon of Christ” and “this icon is sanctified by power of the Holy Spirit” means that “the resemblance”, sacramentally asserted, confers the icon the charisma of the inherent presence of the Name. The icons of the same Prototype, and especially of Christ, are innumerable – but only identified by his unique Name, every one icon being one aspect of His. The Eucharist makes possible changing the matter of this world into heavenly and transcendent reality<sup>20</sup>.

Representation of Christ is a dreaded task. Similarly it is with the representation of man created in God’s image. We ought not to falsify the slightest traits, thus risking falling into caricature. Trampling the human face too, means an offense against God. Hence the requirement of the Eastern Church icon painters to comply with a set of canons, guides and shields guaranteeing continuity and doctrinal unity above borders. Canonically defined, the theme of the icon is not of artist competency. The same happens with its symbolism. Different from profane art, where symbolism is expressed through allegory, the icon theme will not be the result of an intellectual thinking, because it spontaneously reveals the mystery it represented. Moreover, the icon lives in this reality and can only be understood from the inside, lifting a corner of the veil of spiritual Reality beyond any verbal formulation. Secondary symbolism, which refers to the major details of the icon, can be easily understood. Hand gestures indicating prayer are similar, especially in the *Deisis* icon, or in those of the martyrs holding a cross in hand, the power of their testimony.

The human attire is unchanging, as gestures and many other details.

If the eighteenth century, especially, gives examples purely spiritual of icons and therefore strictly symbolic (“all seeing eye”, “eye that never sleeps”), we must in see this an obliteration from Tradition. Through their gratuity, they emphasize all the better the foundation of true icons in whose tissue flows Church blood. In 787, the seventh Ecumenical Council decreed, in this respect, the following: only the technical aspect of the work depends on the painter, but the whole plan, its disposition and composition belong and depend on the Holy Fathers in a very clear way (Nicaea II, 6, a, 252 C). And in 1551, the Moscow Council said:

Archbishops and Bishops from all cities and monasteries in their dioceses should take care of church painters and control their work.

Thus, the first models, as well as the works of the greatest icon painters were given as examples. At the Moscow Council, above mentioned, the Holy Trinity icon painted by Rublev is proposed as the “perfect model”. This explains the fact

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 177-184.

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that iconographs progressively have textbooks at their disposal that give precise information on the manner of painting and reproduce features of saints. The best manual remains that of the monk Dionysius of Fournadrawn in the seventeenth century at the request of the monks of Athos.

#### IV. Conclusions. The Icon and Modern Art

Since its inception, Western theology has shown some dogmatic indifference to the spiritual importance of sacred art, to this iconography which, despite the large number of martyrs is so revered in the East. However, providentially, Western art has lagged behind theological thought and, until the twelfth century, remained faithful to the tradition common to both East and West. This unique tradition lives fully in the magnificent Romanesque art in the cathedral of Chartres miracle, in Italian painting which still cultivates the *Byzantine manner*.

Christ is “the head of the body, the Church, Who is the beginning, the First-born from the dead” (*Colossians* I.18). however, even the first defenders of the icon separated in a simple way the two natures and put the visible in Christ humanity and the invisible in His divinity. The image does not divide in nature, because it has its origin in the Hypostasis as a unit. A Hypostasis in two natures means two ways of being of an Image: visible and invisible. The Divine is invisible but is reflected in the human visible. The icon of Christ is possible, true and real, for His image, according to our human way, is identical to the invisible one, according to the image of God – both being two aspects of the one Hypostasis-Image. According to St. John Damascene, the energies of the two natures, created and uncreated, intertwine. In the hypostatic union, the deified humanity of Christ participates in the divine glory and makes us see God. When art forgets the sacred language of symbols and presences and plastically treats “religious subjects”, transcendent breath no longer penetrates it<sup>21</sup>.

Universal equalization grinds the Unique, the Idea, the Sacred and replaces them with the magic of a whirling motion of a self lacking truth. There isn't the eternity crumbled by sin in time any more, but it is time fragmented into nothingness. Once, the great masters, touching any part of the being, gave the feeling that they hold in their hands the whole world, throbbing vitality. Today, on huge billboards, the world is reduced to the poverty of a few fragments<sup>22</sup>.

This is reminiscent of what Andre Gide said: “Art gives birth to constraints and dies from freedom”<sup>23</sup>. Sexual violence torments painters like Goetz and Osso-

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67-85.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> Justin O'Brien, *Portrait of André Gide: A Critical Biography*, Octagon Books, 1977, p. 337.

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rio or sculptors like Pevsner, Arp, Stahly, Etienne Martin. Besides “collages” and “automatic dictate”, the irrationalism of Max Ernst or Dali unites photographic accuracy of objects and changes their function, namely “the meltingclock”. Pollock and the whole American school of *Action Painting*, show speed automatism as aiming to exclude consciousness. The colors are thrown on canvas without the painter even touching it in order to avoid anything on a platform; at specific music sounds, Georges Mathieu draws in trance. A huge cloth ten square meters – is covered during one hour. The tubes are open, colours gushing out and throw themselves, we can say, as required by the magical ambience of trance.

Finally, the artist is in a complete state of apathy. Impulsive spontaneity of viscera walks along with preconscious chaos. By profanity, apparently deliberate, the large panels of Bernard Buffet are quite symptomatic. Their unique subject shows monstrous birds, with looks of cadaverous immobility and trampling the naked body of the woman. All veils, even the anatomic ones are torn and very well researched positions lead to the last and shameless desecration of human mystery. In front of these canvases, with their specific rotting smell, a passage from Saint John the Sinaite *Scale* comes to mind: A saint, “after seeing feminine beauty, cried for joy and praised the Creator ... such a person has already risen before the common Resurrection”.

All knowledge is to exalt sensible things to their intelligible structure and perceive their unity. The presence of ideal content in a material form, their harmony, conditions the aesthetics of being that any artist reads and comments upon. However, due to the freedom of his spirit, man can violate the rules, he can even pervert them. This precisely because freedom is the greatest within the aesthetic field by which Beauty touches on the human heart without a necessary connection with the Good and Truth. Seeking the infinite, the human Eros can stop at the created *Sophia*, identifying it (created Sophia) with God, making nature divine. Moreover, in this Luciferic identification, Eros itself can be taken as the source of cosmic outbreak, it can be considered Infinite, thus depriving itself of God.

Iconoclasts believed in symbols, but because of their “portraiture” thinking on art (imitation, copy), they refused the icon its symbolic nature and, therefore, did not believe in a mysterious presence of the Model in the image. They did not feel that besides the visible representation of a sensitive reality (copy-portrait), there is a different art in which the image shows “the seen of the unseen”, thus revealing itself as the authentic symbol. They would have accepted with more pleasure abstract art in its geometric figuration, for example the cross without the crucified. But resemblance specific to the icon is opposed to any portrait and is only related to the hypostasis (person) and his heavenly body.

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Science has profoundly altered our cosmic landscape. Obviously, it became impossible to use spatial images naively: the heaven above, hell below and the angels playing our musical instruments in abstract art, but as an additional matter, shapes lost their transcendental contents. From fear of matter, artistic dematerialization depersonalizes the world. Art tends towards the absolute, but leaves from a void; his momentum takes nothing with him from this world, not even a piece of its flesh. It is a tight art of pure rhythms in which the subject is esoteric and spiritual subjectivity of the artist, games of his unconsciousness. He creates a world of his own that no one else can enter from lack of access roads, or is reduced to fleeting fireworks.

On the other hand, in sacred art research, elliptical figures, graphically drawn or simplistic forms pushed to the extreme, can only worsen the situation because none of these images is true. Art thickens, is loaded with blank faces and this is better than scatter them, but the artist does not feel at ease because he does not “see” anything and his art is false. He copies or invents and produces a super-real, inaccessible or hopelessly naive. If profane art expresses anxiety and disorder, the so-called religious art solution is inappropriate; it deceives and does not give any response.

Composition of color spots provides a certain quality of light to translate the infinite, especially in stained glass, as arabesque, with its floral elements, entrelacs or palmettes, introduced some fantasy in the sober Romanesque architecture. When it does not claim to replace the sacred one, abstract art owns the architectural and decorative meaning that former ornamentalists always had.

It is a minor art, with a certain teaching load, for catechumens which are still in the waiting room of Mystery. It can help us all to understand that we are in the presence of Beauty, not because there would be nothing to add, but nothing can be removed, because it is boundless, but bears no disagreement.

Modern iconphilosophy is called more than ever to rediscover the creative power of ancient iconography and overcome the immobility of “copyist” art. If the world lost any style as an expression of the human universal and spiritual communion of souls, the image of God imposes itself today in order to interpret time in His light. The Liturgy teaches us today, more than ever before, that art breaks down not because it is an offspring of its time, but because it is refractory to its sacerdotal functions: making art a theophany, amid deceived and buried hopes, sanctifying the icon, the angel of the Presence, “in beautifully colored garment” as sophianic beauty of the Church. His face is human: on the one hand, we have the Holy Face of God-Man and, on the other, the Woman clothed with the sun, “Joy of Joy”, “the one who wars against any grief” and inexhaustible source of comfort.