THE RE-CURRENT CRISIS OF ICONOCLASM

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Even after the momentous events of 1989 the map of Europe does not exactly look like an icon. If anything at all, it resembles a jigsaw puzzle in which the more the parts become visible the more one is at a loss how to put them together. Instinctively come to mind the words of Goethe:

> Wer will was Lebendigs erkennen und beschreiben,
> Sucht zuerst den Geist herauszutreiben,
> Dann hat er die Teile in seiner Hand.
> Fehlt, leider! nur das geistige Band.[1]
>
> Who would study and describe the living, starts
> By driving the spirit out of the parts:
> In the palm of his hands he holds all the sections
> Lacks nothing, except the spirit's connections.

Therefore, in spite of the tremendous revolution of the spirit which took place in 1989 in much of Eastern Europe, Europe did not simply return to a time when there was peace, freedom and justice. A new era of turmoil was ushered in.

The old continent woke up from a rude awakening to find that not just anybody was the sick man in Europe, but that Europe herself is that sick personage in need of plenty of care and attention. Before one thinks of the last rites (and how many historians have depicted almost complacently the final decline of Europe!) one can hope to receive some help from the Spirit. But through Europe's spirit there runs a wall of separation, schism and discord. Europe is sick because the spirit in her is

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1. *Goethe's Faust.* The original German, and a new translation and introduction by W. Kaufmann. Part One and Sections from Part Two. (Anchor Books, Doubleday; New York 1990) lines 1936-1939, pp.198-199.

sick. To reflect over these problems and help find out a solution we have theology, the study of God, the word about God.

Now, oddly enough, the same Faust reserves both some of his most caustic comments, as well as some of his most elevating, for the human wôrd about God, our study of God. Maybe we could subsume both commentaries under the title of crisis. The crisis turns out to be one of the image. In his striving to comprehend spirit Faust is chided by the very spirit that he invokes and at long last appears to him that he, Faust, is alien to the spirit. At this Faust protests that he is after all the image of the godhead.[2] Now, *Faust I* is written in such a German that, unlike much of Goethe's prose, it seems to have been composed in our own time. The problematic therein depicted is certainly that of a person who has much in common with somebody who lives through the crises of our times: Faust's is the case of discontinuity between desire and realization, of a hankering after the supernatural but without being able to perceive transcendent spirit in a continuum with his daily life. His example is instructive of much that has gone sour in contemporary theology. When we are sick, the doctor usually makes us stick out our tongues to make a diagnosis.[3] But our words, no less than the word about God, are themselves sick. They are disconnected. All too often there is no correspondence between spiritual claim and lived experience in our language.

After pointing out to our need for a Word that reaches us from outside our own predicamental situation, a revelation which nowhere shines brighter than in the New Testament, Faust opens the Scripture where St John's Gospel starts and right away advances objections against the word as the highest expression of reality:

> Geschrieben steht: "Im Anfang war das Wort!"
> Hier stock ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?
> Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen.
> Ich muß es anders übersetzen,
> Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin.
> Geschrieben steht: Im Anfang war der Sinn.
> Bedenke wohl die erste Zeile,
> Daß deine Feder sich nicht übereile!
> Ist es der Sinn, der alles wirkt und schafft?
> Es sollte stehn: Im Anfang war die Kraft!
> Doch, auch indem ich dieses niederschreibe,

2. Ibid., lines 510-517, pp.104-105. For Goethe's openness to the icon see P. Evdokimov, *L'art de l'icône*, (Desclée de Brouwer; Bruges 1972) 144-145.

3. Comparison used by St Francis de Sales in his *Introduction à la vie dévote*.

Schon warnt mir was, daß ich dabei nicht bleibe.
Mir hilft der Geist, auf einmal seh ich Rat
Und schreibe getrost: Im Anfang war die Tat![4]

It says: "In the beginning was the *Word*."
Already I am stopped. It seems absurd.
The *Word* does not deserve the highest prize,
I must translate it otherwise
If I am well inspired and not blind.
It says: In the beginning was the *Mind*.
Ponder that first line, wait and see,
Lest you should write too hastily.
Is mind the all-creating source?
It ought to say: In the beginning there was *Force*.
Yet something warns me as I grasp the pen,
That my translation must be changed again.
The Spirit helps me. Now it is exact.
I write: In the beginning was the *Act*."

Even if expressed in terms of philosophies prevalent at the time, such as Fichte's dynamism and Spinoza's striving, we are here faced with somebody articulately expressing the bankruptcy of words.

This, too, is directly relevant to our theme. Then, as we shall have occasion to say, the symbol finds its first analogate, its own best image, in the human word, as does the Second Person of the Trinity when as Logos or the eternal Word of God He wants to express Himself in the world of humans. In other words: Whatever stands for something else not by simple convention, as in the case of a flag which represents a particular country, or simply by natural affinity, as smoke recalls fire, but by virtue of an inner spiritual relationship of the symbol to the thing symbolized, finds its first image or medium of expression in the human word. Significantly enough, the icon will be defined as a special union of word and image. Consequently, we have to be able to make a better diagnosis if we want at all to move ahead with the resolution of our problem. The problem, however, is not a minor one. It touches a comprehensive way of perceiving our relationship to words capable of expressing the deepest reality — words capable of functioning as a real symbol, and thus not just a natural or a conventional one.

4. Kaufmann (ed.), ibid., lines 1224-1237, pp.152-153.

Crisis in European Theology

In view of the presence of crises we are likely to feel insecure. But if we want to know where we stand as human beings there are several barometers which give us a clear hint as to where we are. One of these is undoubtedly art. Modern art has become to a large extent a bewildering array of incomprehensible "isms," from which many a beauty-lover could feel himself excluded on principle.[5] Without denying all that bears in it the hallmark of genius we must admit that, generally speaking, with a number of exceptions which rather confirm the rule, we are not seldom at a loss trying to figure out its purpose or even make out its configuration. Should this be any indication of our position in being, our status as beings, then the only thing that comes to mind is: Being has lost its way! Judging by appearances, we have collectively lost our bearings without much hope of retracing our steps.

In this bleak landscape one beacon of light is the current worldwide fascination with the icon. In some ways, the icon does have something in common with modern art, if only through some eccentric ways of making its point approaching at times surrealism. But there is where the similarity ends. For modern art presupposes a whole development from objectivism to subjectivism.[6] It passed through the various stages starting with the brute awakening of the Renaissance, a kind of collective adolescence for the Western consciousness which became increasingly aware of its own identity, to subsequently plunge into the self-tearing of the Enlightenment, and finally go to pieces under the constant hammering of a progressively self-differentiating individualism. Thus, the immense progress attained in these intellectual movements was bought at a high price. In marked contrast, the icon has been not seldom referred to as an art particularly appreciated by children, the implication being that this art has remained fixed at an early phase in growth and therefore greatly in need to be overhauled. And whereas God seems to a large extent banished from modern art the icon is meant to be but a mirror of His grandeur.

Our theme

The present studies want to elaborate a point about the theology connected with the icon. They want to review some of the positions taken in its regard in order to draw some theological conclusions. This it attempts by narrowing the scope somewhat, in order to avoid encroaching on so many other aspects of the icon. So we must restrict our formal object, as scholastics would have said.

5. "Modern" here is used in a sense to include contemporary trends, and not in a technical sense that distinguishes between modern and post-modern etc.

6. Evdokimov, *L'art de l'icône*, 67-68.

Indeed, already a first question might be formulated in such a way as to give rise to doubt. If the icon is so central why not call these studies "Towards a theology of the icon?" Why use instead the term "theology of the symbol? I start by calling your attention to the fact that both words are of good Greek provenance. Nonetheless, their respective use may entail a considerable shift in meaning. The world is interested in the icon, but it may be interested for the wrong reasons, just because of the current mode or a personal ephemeral infatuation. The icon is a sacred image, and a yearning for the approach to life expressed in it might prove to be the real cause of the fascination. Now, this *Weltanschauung,* or better still, this living theology of the icon, is precisely the kind of antidote our modern rationalistic world needs. To show that this theology goes beyond a mere technical explanation of what the icon is all about we prefer to call it: theology of the symbol; of the real symbol, and not of the natural or conventional type of symbol.

Naturally, such an enterprise is already ambitious enough, so why aggravate it by means of a new task, namely the reference to the crisis of European theology? I believe that the kind of theology the theology of the icon is, like the incarnation itself, from which it derives its ultimate justification, calls for a concrete context. Otherwise it runs the risk of being speculation up in the air, with no concrete referents to go by. Certainly, European theology itself is a moot-issue. To begin with, is there such a thing as a European theology? Or is it only a desideratum — or, maybe, not even a desideratum?! But again, the whole idea of putting theology in its proper context is to make sure that the impact of the Gospels will not be at cross purposes with the world. The need we currently feel to talk of such a theology is the need to reflect about the Christian roots of Europe, East and West. We are convinced that by going backwards in time we can advance forward in vision.

Now, the theology practised in Europe is certainly pluralistic. It cannot be reduced to a common denominator. To try to enumerate even briefly the main currents found in it would be well-nigh an impossible task. Still one may discern in it some common patterns, some trends which are on their way in and others on their way out. At times the kind of theologies practised in Europe tends to cut through denominational lines. There has been a revival of the Fathers and it is by and large considered to be good manners not to ignore them and to augur well to have them on your side. One of the overriding priorities in Europe is the desire for dialogue, not only with the Fathers, but with all those who make up the human situation. But the present determining fact is that doing theology here in Europe under present-day conditions is caught up in a huge crisis. On account of its very pluralism theology seeks unity. But unity is not seldom sought with divisive means. One obvious divisive method is abrasive polemics. If somebody carries on dialogue with presuppositions of more polemical times one might frustrate one's own purpose in starting dialogue to begin with. If a marriage-broker believes in divorce, he has only himself to blame if his matches do not last long.

It is the claim of these studies that unity in theology is guaranteed through the theology of real symbol. Perhaps the best word which comes closest for our purposes is icon. Althouh standard use reserves it in the first place for the sacred image, the present studies are obviously wider in scope than what concerns directly sacred images, though we shall have occasion to establish relations between the two. For all practical purposes, we may say, at the start, that on many points the theology of the icon and that of the real symbol meet half-ways. However, we must also be quite aware, and right from the start, of some of the problems. Whereas the theologies current in the West are more exposed to the dangers of iconoclasm or the mentality of breaking up vital links, the theologies common in the East are not always so vulnerable. This is sometimes their merit, because they have preserved intact some of the antidotes present in the theology of the Fathers. Sometimes however they have not yet caught up with the problem.

The re-current temptation of iconoclasm

If then this schism in the soul called iconoclasm is at the root of the current crisis in Europe, influencing adversely the theologies which are practised in it, we should be well advised to start by trying to figure out the nature of this problem. Now, it would seem, that, in order to understand iconoclasm we must somehow define the icon. At once difficulties of a various kind crop up. For example, what define first: the icon or iconoclasm? If one contents oneself with a nominal definition it is very easy indeed. "Icon" comes from the Greek word for image, and "iconoclasm" means "image-smashing". The classical crisis of iconoclasm within Christian theology is generally considered to have taken place between around 725 and 843. It is instructive that this period is generally divided into two major phases. In the first, prior to the Second Council of Nicaea (787) iconoclasts destroyed images. In the second, starting about 815, the tendency was to permit icons even in Church for purposes of illustration of the Bible, only their veneration (and sometimes only some forms of it) were prohibited. The lesson to be drawn is obvious: it is not enough to admire icons, as is often the case nowadays, in order not to qualify as an iconoclast! It is not enough to have museums full of icons and to be a passionate collector: something more is required.

In turn, this additional element must somehow go into the very definition of the icon. It is not any technically exact definition of icon that counts, but rather the fact that icons are held up for veneration, with all that this implies. Icons have been defined as a cult-image, though it would be more exact to say that icons have a distinct reference to the liturgy,[7] that even when confined to the home they express

7. R. Stichel, "Gedanken zur Wesensbestimmung der Ikone," in W. Kasack, *Die geistlichen Grundlagen der Ikone* (Verlag 0. Sagner; München 1989) 22-25.

the extension of the influence of the liturgy to all domains of life, and that restricting them to museums can be a subtle form of abuse.[8] The liturgical use icons are put to is in turn an index and a guarantee of the primacy of the spiritual in Christian life and thought. That is to say, the icon, partly because of its essential link to the liturgy, but also because of its own specific traits, is a spiritual object before it can ever claim to be an aesthetic object. One may even raise the question whether an icon is deep down not any art which, prior to any artistic merits it may have, is of its nature religious, and more specifically mystic, i.e. promotes effectively union with God.

To say in a nutshell what an icon is must always reckon with this limit, namely that the criteria enunciated, whether they touch geometric harmony, chromatic patterns or theological semantics have validity only in so far as they are subservient to a living theology. At any rate, as a spiritual object, its spirituality is understood as unitive: as forming a unity with dogma. Together they form the unitive vision of theology, spirituality being considered to be lived dogma and dogma articulate and officially endorsed spirituality.

Because of this comprehensive unity all summary definitions of icons prove to be one-sided. They have been described as sacred images of the Eastern Church which are usually flat. To avoid the impression of depth, they may cut a building in half and show its sides; events usually happen in front of buildings; to suggest they happen inside a rather clumsy pavilion is attached from one useless building to another. Naturally, as Bishop Kallistos Ware has pointed out, there was at the time of the iconoclastic crisis images in relief, and even free-standing statues, and they do not seem to have played a significant part in the classical case of iconoclasm.[9] In the Serraglio Museum at Constantinople, as well as in private collections, there are enough instances of statues etc. to debunk any pretension that only two-dimenional images were allowed, even after the classical crisis of iconoclasm.[10]

Closely alligned to this characteristic is what is called the **inverse perspective**. By it is meant that the lines of focus of an icon seem to converge in the spectator himself, unlike other images painted according to the lineal or central perspective, which reproduces things as they appear to us and which gives the impression that the lines of a street intersect on the distant horizon, in a focus behind the picture.[11]

8. Cfr H.G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, (J.C.B. Mohr; Tübingen 1975) 143.

9. Cfr K. Ware, "The Theology and Spirituality of the Icons," in *From Byzantium to El Greco*, published by the Greek Ministry of Culture and the Royal Academy of Arts, (London 1987) 38.

10. L. Bouyer, *Vérité des icônes* (Criterion; Milan 1984) 127.

11. S. Babolin, *Icona e Conoscenza. Preliminari di una teologia iconica*, (Gregoriana, Libreria

The term "inverse perspective" was used by O. Wulff in 1907.[12] But already three years afterwards K. Doehlemann criticized it as inappropriate, since it assumes that iconographers knew of the lineal or central perspective, rediscovered in the West c. 1300 by Giotto di Bondone and Pietro Cavallini in painting and by Giovanni Pisano and Arnolfo di Cambio in sculpture.[13]

Both Wulff's term and Doehlemann's criticism are inexact. For one thing, in ancient times allowance was made for optical distortions, so as not to represent things distorted as they appeared to the innocent eye. Thus, the columns of the Parthenon on the Acropolis, Athens, are somewhat swollen in the middle to create the impression that they plunge straight down like the mason's lead. And, just in case we think we have to wait for the Italian renaissance to see an awakening of classical motifs, Byzantine historians like W. Threadgold speak of "Renaissances before the Renaissance."

Indeed, while the theory of Italian influences on Byzantine art were soon voiced, the opposite theory of Byzantine influences on Italian art was put forward by N. Okunev in 1928.[14] There exists nowadays a growing consensus that what Cimabue (died c. 1302), Duccio di Buoninsegna (died c. 1318), and Giotto (died c. 1336) did was to replace the local Italian *arte bizantina*, "but what they attempted and achieved in their work had *already* been anticipated by court painters (e.g., Dimitrije, Djordje and Teodor) in the churches built under the Nemanjić dynasty in the Balkans (usually referred to as the «Raška School») late in the 12th c. and early in the 13th c., and was later often excelled by the successors (e.g. Astrapas, Mihajlo and Eutihije) of those painters in the late 13th c. and early 14th c."[15] And that great connoisseur, G. Mathew, shows convincingly that what we call "inverse perspective" in Giotto can show for it a whole series of anticipations in Byzantine art.[16] Of course, this is not to deny Western influences on Byzantine icons, so long

Editrice; Padova 1990) 162-163. J. Baggley, *Doors of Perception — icons and their spiritual significance* (Mowbray; London & Oxford 1987) 80-81, speaks of the lineal perspective as "normal perspective." H. Fischer, in his *Die Ikone: Ursprung — Sinn — Gestalt* (Herder; Freiburg i.Br. 1989) speaks of the "Zentraloder Fluchtpunktsperspektive" (p.164), but criticizes the expression "inverse perspective" as saying nothing positive.

12. R. Stichel, *Die Geburt Christi in der russischen Ikonenmalerei. Voraussetzungen in Glauben und Kunst des christlichen Ostens und Westens*, (Franz Steiner Verlag; Stuttgart 1990) 144-145.

13. J. Børtnes, *Visions of Glory: Studies in Early Russian Hagiography.* (Solum Forlag A/S; Oslo 1988, Humanities Press International, INC. New Jersey 1988) 94.96.

14. Cfr J. Børtnes, *Visions of Glory*, 101.

15. J.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, (Penguin; London 1987) 563.

16. Cfr G. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthtetics.* (John Murray; London 1963) 19.31-32.152; H.W. Janson, *History of Art*, 14(Prentice-Hall, Inc.; Eaglewood Cliffs, N.J. 1969) 267-282.

as one accepts that influences were mutual and varied with the different ages and their priorities.

Now P. Florenskij adopted the idea of "inverse perspective" in his work carrying the same title.[17] The mistake turns out to be in part a felix culpa! Florenskij is a great theoretician, but great artists live from their immediate contact with reality. Thus, while quite a number of iconographers painted in a way which does not correspond to the realism adopted in the Renaissance because it did not occur to them to paint otherwise, maybe even because they were ignorant of the lineal perspective,[18] the great masters could follow their intuitions without the need to reflect on it. Besides, there are indications that some of the great artists at times used quite consciously both perspectives.[19] In the case of great iconographers they instinctively chose a perspective different from our own in order to portray divine reality as being other than our world. Florenskij himself notes this in the case of a great artist like Domenikos Theotokopoulos (died 1614), more known as "El Greco." Starting by depicting icons in his native Crete (we have a beautiful Koimisis from him, for example, which he even signed)[20], he then moved to Spain and gave us such masterpieces as "The Burial of the Count of Orgaz." Here he uses the linear or central perspective when he depicts the earthly scene and a perspective different from this when he depicts the heavenly side of the reality.[21]

So, while we cannot accept the definition of icons as determined by inverse perspective, also because the very term seems to suggest that realism in painting is normative,[22] it remains true that these icons are usually composed with an observation point usually different from our own, one that intends to portray a

17. Florenskij , *La prospettiva rovesciata e altri scritti*, (A cura di N. Misler) (Casa del libro; Roma 1983) 73-135.

18. For the relationship of mathematical progress in the Renaissance and developments in Western art cfr D. Bergamini, *Mathematik*, (GmbH; Reinbek bei Hamburg 1969) 76-98.

19. Fischer writes: "Nun sind...szenische Ikonen niemals als ganze nach dem Prinzip dieser «umgekehrten Perspektive» gemalt. Denn dann entstünde ja auch eine Art «umgekehrter Raum» und die Personen und Gegenstände müßten zum Bildhintergrund hin größer werden. Diese Art der Perspektive bleibt daher stets auf einzelne Bildelemente beschränkt und in das größere Konzept der Bedeutungsperspektive eingebunden. In einzelnen Bildteilen kann auch die Zentral- oder Fluchtpunktperspektive eingesetzt werden," *Die Ikone*, 170.

20. *From Byzantium to El Greco*, 133.190-191.

21. P. Florenskij, *La prospettiva rovesciata*, 103-104. See also: Janson, *History of Art*, 376-377.

22. Pertinent is what Børtnes says: "If the term «perspective» as used by art historians is to be transferred to literary criticism, it must be treated as an historical concept. In the same way as the central perspective of the Renaissance signifies only one possibility of perspective representation, literary historians will have to realise that the naturalistic tenet of a fixed standpoint is only one of a number of possibilities. ... A Byzantine pictorial cycle is not represented from a fixed optical standpoint, but is meant to be viewed from shifting angles," *Visions of Glory*, 72.

transfigured world and bring out the symbolic worth of persons and scenes. Indeed, transfiguration may be said to be the theme of all icons: to show that the eschatological world is already incipiently present in those who have let in God's grace into their lives. An author like M.G. Muzj could entitle her presentation of icons Transfiguration.[23] Transfiguration was the first icon which a monk of Mount Athos was supposed to start with, kneeling, and early in the morning after sunrise, and not without a solid spiritual preparation beforehand.

Another useful way of looking at icons defines them as the locus of intersection where the Word of God becomes visible. Precisely because of this intrinsic tie-up between Word and image the common diction has it that one "writes" an icon, one does not paint it, a viewpoint reflected in the word icono*graphy* itself. This true dimension must, however, be abetted by what was said previously: icons are images essentially linked to worship and liturgy. They are linked to liturgy because they have their place in the iconostasis or icon-stand separating the nave (representing earth) from the sanctuary (representing heaven) and joining both under the same vault. Since theirs is a Church ministry, iconographers as a rule do not sign. Icons, when finished, have to be blessed, even if in the Greek rite, unlike the Russian, there is no rite, the first prayer said before them counting as blessing.[24]

Although the aforementioned viewpoints by and large complement one another, we wish to put forward a definition, which may even strike somebody as being a tautology, but which in effect tries to capture the good points of the above definitions. Icons are sacred images necessarily implying a theology of the real symbol. They thus confront the present world in its current configuration with the same world as it should be transfigured in the light of God's grace and as it shall be transfigured when God shall be all in all (1 Cor 15,28).

In line with this thought, we have to distinguish between monopolistic claims, sometimes advanced to enhance the value of the icon, and its true meaning, at once particular and universal. The first current meaning of the icon is that it is a sacred image typical of the Christian East and used in its worship. Over and above this definition we have to keep in mind that, in spite of differences, not to be underestimated or watered down, the icon was for long common to East and West. Inextricably intertwined with this specific meaning of icons is a whole outlook, which may best be characterized as an antidote to rationalism and may be articulated in a theology of symbol. This in turn tries to relay Christian faith as a vision, while relying on such Gospel keywords as glory, transfiguration and communion,

23. *Trasfigurazione: Introduzione alla contemplazione delle icone*, (Ed. Paoline; Milano 1987).

24. See Fischer, *Die Ikone*, 206; Bischof Alipij, "Die Grundlagen der Ikonenmalerei," W. Kasack, ibid., 43.

and employing the philosophical vocabulary of unity-in-difference (typical of, but not exclusive to, Neoplatonic emanationistic philosophy).

Precisely because of its universal meaning the temptation to do away with icons, or to deny them what is their due, is a recurrent one. Temptation, in theology, is the fascination of only one moment at the expense of the global vision of Christianity. This happens by forgetting that the Christian faith is a living tradition, with a past, present and future. When one yields to the lure of the past one becomes a fundamentalist. Absolutizing the present is tantamount to a sort of modernism. Closing oneself to anything but one's future expectations is to become a utopist, i.e. indulge in a one-way eschatology. Now, one succumbs to the temptation of iconoclasm whenever one interprets culture diabolically instead of sym-bolically.[25] "Dia-bolical," (Gr. "throwing apart"), here means reconstructing cultural data wrongly by separating what belongs together. It is a divorce at the ontological, theological and societal levels. On the contrary, "sym-bolical" interpretation, from the Greek for "throwing together," reconstructs cultural data rightly by putting together factors which at first seem incompatible. A more careful analysis shows that one factor, seen in its proper light, heralds the other.[26]

Instances of the recurrence of the temptation may be seen in the iconoclasm variants which there were prior to 725 in Judaism, in Islam[27] and in other religions. And we meet iconoclasm once again in the Protestant crisis, in much of modern art and in the death-of-God theology. Perhaps it will strike us that some of these crises are quite central in the history of humanity. The question is raised whether we can detect some sort of intelligible pattern in this recurrence. Maybe we can turn the question around and ask whether some patterns in the modern crisis of theology do not meet some of the characteristics of iconoclasm.

Here again, that pulse of the human which is literature can shed some light. Our modern crisis, with its challenge of the use of the name "father" for God, its accentuating of feminine qualities in the deity, its recourse to theosophic elements as a nostrum for a search for which no simple answer presents itself, has been aptly called by the Heidegger disciple Hans Jonas "a gnostic age."[28] Modern scholarship tends to look at gnosticism as having arisen only after the arrival of Christianity

25. J. Rousse, "Pavel Evdokimov: Un testimone della bellezza di Dio," in: P. Evdokimov, *Teologia della bellezza*, (Paoline; Roma 1984) 20.

26. Evdokimov, *L'art de l'icône*, 143-144.

27. O. Grabar, "Islam and Iconoclasm," in A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds), *Iconoclasm*, (University of Birmingham; Birmingham 1977) 45-52.

28. W. Kasper, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, (Grünewald; Mainz 1982) 173-175.

but before the New Testament was yet committed to writing.[29] Many modern scholars would point to Simon Magus, depicted so plastically in the eighth chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles*, as being its originator. In his system, too, was contemplated a goddess Selene or Helena, whom he had met in a brothel in Tyre and who came to be known as "Ennoia" or the thought of God. Simon himself was known in Rome by the epithet of "Faustus," i.e. "enjoying divine favour."[30] Here we meet with Goethe's *Faust* again, in whose second part Helena plays a decisive part; at least this link merits to be pursued.[31]

We need not tarry at length over the gnostic traits of our age. A figure like A. de Saint-Exupéry's "petit prince" is, in his own way, an expression of the nostalgic missing of the true God of revelation with the consequent compensation of restlessly moving from planet to planet;[32] from emanation to emanation, as the gnostic would have said, in order to have some surrogate satisfaction, some surrogate metaphysics, some surrogate ethics in a world in which, to use the words of Rilke's first elegy, "we do not feel very much at home in our interpreted world."[33] No wonder that the little prince asks what "becoming familiar" or "drawing close" means. Both the gnostic and the modern crises are crises of *Heimatlosigkeit* ("uprootedness"). Both exercise a fascination because they try to find a short cut to the relationship between the divine prototype and the created image. One of the French impressionist P. Gauguin's last paintings (1903) was entitled: "D'où sommes nous?" ("Whence do we come?") This corresponds exactly to the gist of gnostic inquietude, which may be summarized as "Whence are we? Who are we? Whither are we headed?"[34]

Enough has been said to enable us to locate crisis in modern and contemporary culture. Crisis comes from the Greek and means: time to decide, with the frequent implication that there is not much time left. We see, of course, all sorts of crises. We may take under consideration the crisis of the holy, both in religious practice

29. P. Hofrichter, *Im Anfang war der "Johannesprolog,"* (Pustet; Regensburg 1986) 365.

30. Cfr M. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, II (Translated by W.R. Trask) (University of Chicago Press; Chicago & London) 375-379.

31. Goethe ends his *Faust* so: "Alles Vergängliche/Ist nur ein Gleichnis/.../Das Ewig-Weibliche/ Zieht uns hinan;" "What is destructible/ Is but a parable;/.../The Etemal-Feminine/Lures to perfection," lines 12104-12105 and l2110-12111, in Kaufmann, *Goethe's Faust*, 502-503.

32. P. Blanchard, *Sainteté aujourd'hui*, (Desclée de Brouwer; Bruges ^{2}1953) 144-160.

33. R.M. Rilke, *Duineser Elegien* (Insel Verlag; Frankfurt a. Main 1970) 9.

34. Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 78.1; K. Rudolph, *Gnosis* (Trans. by R.M. Wilson) (Harper & Row; S. Francisco 1983) 71; P.Culianu, *Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno: Hans Jonas. L'«Erma» di Bretschneider*, (Roma 1985) 18. For the discussion of the relationship between prototype and image see Excerpta ex Theodoto 7.5.

and in literature and the arts.[35] Crisis in theology is to be attributed to the loss of the icon in western culture along with a corresponding loss of the unitive vision in theology. An instance of this loss of unity may be seen in the divorce between theology and spirituality. The loss of the iconic consciousness means that our truth is less true and our beauty is less beautiful. Our dogmatics textbooks in the West, if not rationalistic, have lost the large extent conceptualistic; our ethics, if not arbitrary, has become voluntaristic, because strongly divorced from dogma, spirituality and liturgy. Our liturgy is in danger of becoming ritualistic, and where it has tried to save itself has at times become instead chaotic. In society at large the loss of iconic consciousness is seen in the loss of whole sections of Christian consciousness and a desperado attempt to have a surrogate sectarian standing in decency and being. Sects are rampant as a result.[36]

To sum it up: Current fascination with the icon is at once a symptom of a malaise and a sign of hope. Culture in general is tired of its own rationalism. The fascination itself may lead to the basic issues underlying healing in theology and spirituality, if it does not remain a self-centred cultural phenomenon and thus little better than camouflaged iconoclasm.

SECOND PART
A PARALLEL (A): EARLY STIRRINGS IN CHRISTIAN ART

In order to show what precisely this iconoclastic temptation consists in we wish to set up a parallel between beginnings in Christian art and in Christian thought.

If our inklings are correct then we have to try and see what kind of history we ought to write in order to respond to the question implied in this study. What approach should we take in order to talk about an era that eludes to a large extent our scientific control? Surely, if I were to ask you have you come here to this hall to listen to me you know; whereas if we were to ask some who have recourse to history for their conclusions how they reach them I am afraid they do not. That is why asking a question of method is challenging. Now, the kind of method some use in order to interpret history is what one might call: a perverse perspective! Historians write a history with assumptions. It is to be doubted whether it is at all possible to write history without them, so, nothing more natural in the world than to admit it so as to free oneself from unnecessary entanglements. More specifically,

35. G. Sommavilla, "L'arte moderna nell'eclissi del sacro," e A. Moda, "Letteratura e filosofia come interrogativi per la teologia: l'esempio di H.U. von Balthasar," *Credere oggi* 36 (1986) 16-26 e 49-64.

36. S. Babolin, "La teologia orientale dell'icona," *Credere oggi*, 36 (1986) 76.

writing the history of the icon forces us to make a decision: With what principles do we distinguish: here Western Christian and there Eastern Christian art?

A small confirmation not simply to take for granted what is generally assumed comes through modern historiography, which thoroughly recognises that a date like 1054 for the schism between East and West is a largely conventional date. Not only does Cardinal Umberto da Silva Candida seem to have overstepped his authority, an authority rendered all the more dubious because the Pope, St Leo IX, was dead by the time, not only did the excommunication touch only the Cardinal and the Patriarch, — in which case the excommunication pronounced by Pope Martin IV in 1282 would appear far more dangerous! — but frequent instances of *communicatio in sacris* between Catholics and Orthodox may be found in Greece even after the repealing of the Union decree of the Council of Florence (1439). More directly pertinent to our theme, the iconic mentality seems to have remained in both East and West long after the schism is supposed to have taken place.[37] And, if art is any indication, then we have yet another instance of the fact that the pulses of history did not react as conventional history does.

The first question thus becomes: Are we sure that the icon is in its inspiration an Eastern invention? I want here at once to anticipate my thesis: it is not only hard to draw a line between early Christian (paleo-Christian) and Byzantine art, as well as between Eastern Roman and Western Roman art (both Christian), but at the end we are left with evidence, analogous to that of the rise of monasticism, that the icon is a common heritage of Christianity, or, more precisely, that there is a common iconic mentality, common for at least a millennium in both East and West.[38]

In a nut-shell, early Christian art can be distinguished from Roman art not so much according to the form as according to the content. Old forms are now given a new interpretation.[39] Two such instances may be cited: the "good shepherd" and the "orante" motifs. Perhaps it should cause little wonder that the image of a shepherd carrying a stray sheep around his neck to bring it back to the fold was so common. After all, this motif can easily be traced across literature and art. The *Poimandres* is an important work of gnostic literature as the *Pastor* of Hermas that of the Great Church, East and West. In art we find it among both Greeks and Romans. In the catacombs we come across it on Christian tombs, but the meaning

37. Bouyer goes so far as to claim: "C'est une erreur fondamentale de croire que l'Occident n'aurait point connu, ou beaucoup plus tôt que l'Orient aurait perdu, l'ancienne tradition iconographique dont nous venons de dégager l'inspiration théologique et spirituelle en suivant son développement." *Vérité des icônes*, 109.

38. Cfr G. Passarelli, "Il monachesimo italo-greco, *Il monachesimo nel primo millennio*. Convegno internazionale di studi (1989), 188-190.

39. Janson, *History of Art*, 159.

is that which we encounter in John 10. However, note that an early version of the shepherd and the stray sheep is found already in Isaias 40,11, a chapter in the so-called Book of Consolation, which in turn is the beginning of what is nowadays termed "Deutero-Isaiah." Indeed, it has rightly been suggested that John resorted to this image precisely because it was a way of gaining access to the educated hellenistic culture. As for the orante, another of the motifs found in early catacomb art and which consists in a figure praying with elevated arms, much as the priest prays the Our Father in the Latin liturgy and which is found in the icon of the Theotokos called Orante, we know that this gesture was a personification of Roman pietas, that Christians continued to use it on tombs (adding traits of the deceased persons) and that early Christians prayed with raised arms.[40]

Naturally, the arts connected with the dead are a special case.[41] Catacombs for one were by no means the property of Christians, since there were collective, private, Jewish etc. catacombs. But if burials forced Christians to extemporize some signs and thus indulge in art, it would go too far to claim that their art started before around 200. For one thing, they simply did not have the material resources (even a religious order dedicated to poverty needs lots of money in the bank),[42] but, most of all, early Christians were so taken up fighting idolatry that they had no leisure for art. In spite of examples to the contrary, early Christians were to a large extent aniconic, without rather than against icons; and a dogmatic consciousness of icons became established only long after Nicaea II — just as belief in the Immaculate Conception, in spite of St Thomas of Aquinas' and St Bernard's objections, became anchored in the Roman Catholic Church's dogmatic consciousness only after Pius IX's proclamation in 1854.

Exceptions, however, there were. St Clement of Alexandria (died c. 215) urged Christians to adopt such images as fish, doves and fishermen on their seal-rings.[43] On the other hand, Eusebius of Caesarea (died c.340) refused to give Constantia, sister of Constantine and widow of Licinius, the portrait of Christ she asked for. And Epiphanius of Salamis (died 403), hammer of heretics and of so much else besides, is supposed to have torn an image in a church he visited in Cyprus.[44]

40. H. Fischer, *Die Ikone*, 49-51. When a medallion with an image of the Child Jesus is added on her breast, this type of image of Our Lady is known as "Theotokos of the Sign" (Russian: Znamenie), because of the Emmanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7,14.

41. E. Sendler, *L'icône, image de l'invisible*,. (Desclée de Brouwer; Bruges 1981), 17-19.

42. Canon 17 of Nicaea II prohibits anybody who does not dispose of adequate resources to found a house of prayer; N.P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* I, (Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press; Washington D.C. 1990) 151-152.

43. Fischer, *Die Ikone*, 41.

44. G. Dumeige, *Nicée II*. L'Orante,(Paris 1978) 32-35.

In brief, it is difficult to distinguish between an East Roman and a West Roman style, corresponding respectively to an East Christian and West Christian before the sixth century.[45] And this on several grounds. We are quite in the dark when it comes to the origins of Christian art. Thus, the discovery of Dura-Europos over fifty years ago (in 1921) has led us to a revision of some of what used to be considered part of our conception of things. In this city-fortress, now in present-day Syria, both a synagogue and a Christian gathering place were unearthed. Subsequent excavations showed that both places of worship had been dug up in the 240's, and that the Romans had surrendered the place around 256 B.C. More importantly, and contrary to what was often assumed about Jewish religion, there emerged a whole series of fresco illustrations from the Bible in the synagogue. The influence of Hellenistic Judaism seems at play, but floor-mosaics in ancient Palestinian synagogues were not unknown. There are interesting parallels between the murals of the synagogue and those of the church.[46]

It is equally difficult to say when Byzantine art is supposed to have started. Some opt for Justinian's reign (527-567), or even decide for a considerably earlier period, whereas others choose the period subsequent to the iconoclastic crisis.[47]

Nonetheless, a case can be made for the parallel development of both Eastern and Western art. A comparison between the contemporary mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore, commissioned by Sixtus III (432-440) and the mausoleum of Galla Placidia (died 450) in Ravenna, goes to show how difficult it is to distinguish, at this stage, between Byzantine and Western Christian, especially if we extend the comparison to mosaics executed in Ravenna after this had become Byzantine in 540.[48] Not to say anything about the fact that Roman art was one of the main inspirations of contemporary art in Byzantium. We should keep in mind that Constantinople, the second Rome, was in its inspiration modelled point by point on the Old Rome. The patron saints of Constantinople were St Peter and Paul, for which feast modern-day Orthodox are still supposed to prepare themselves by a long fast, something which probably no Western Christian in Rome dreams of doing. The feast of St Andrew, the first to be called apostle (Jn 1,40-42), started attaining its unique importance only much later, whether because of past polemics between the two Churches or owing to liturgical reform or what not.[49]

45. Janson, *History of Art*, 169.

46. See K. Weitzmann and H.L. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Dumbarton Oaks; Washington 1990).

47. See W. Sas-Zaloziecky, *Die Byzantinische Kunst*, (Ullstein; Berlin 1963) 36-37.

48. Cfr L. Bouyer, *Verité des icônes*, 115-116.

49. M. Arranz and S. Parenti write: "Si noti che il patronato costantinopolitano di sant'Andrea non

At this juncture, one could stop for a moment to reflect on the role of mosaics generally. It has been pointed out that, where pagan temples demanded sculpture, Christian churches call for mosaics.[50] There is, however, a more profound role for mosaics. We have, already from the fourth century, a series of churches in North Africa whose mosaics have remained intact. They sometimes illustrate scenes from the creation of the world, especially animal nature and the oceans. As we have a number of commentaries of the Fathers on the Hexaemeron, like that of St Basil, we are in a position to work out the kind of correspondence in the hermeneutics that prevailed between word of scripture and images used for it. As a general rule, we have both literal and allegorical interpretation, but mixed interpretations, incorporating both, prevail. Later on, in the dispute of iconoclasm, opponents tried to read into these early positions a confirmation for their positions. Not to depict Christ in human form was taken to be a monophysite aberration. But Severus of Antioch, usually described as tendentially monophysite, at least in his terminology, paradoxically criticizes the use of the dove for the Holy Spirit and the lamb for Christ.[51] All in all, one should watch out against over-generalizations in reading correlations in this type of hermeneutics.

Perhaps the greatest argument that we have that East and West had a common iconoclastic tradition derives from the defence of icons proposed by the Popes when iconoclasm broke out in the second quarter of the eighth century. Naturally many iconographers, fleeing from the imperial wrath in Constantinople, fled to Rome. But this "Greek connection" alone, though it may explain some developments like the Cosmatesque style of 10th-13th centuries in Rome, so called because of the prevalence of the name Cosmas in Roman families of artists, and the death of St Cyril in 869 in a Greek monastery next to S. Maria Maggiore, as well as some decoration in S. Maria in Cosmedin, does not explain everything.[52] Greek refugee painters could find a home in Rome precisely because they were recognized as belonging to the Church for just the same reason which caused them to flee in the first place. So their traces in Rome at this time are of particular interest.

risale liturgicamente oltre il Tardo Medio Evo; nei *Typica* o sinassari del X e XI secolo sant'Andrea è celebrato senza speciale solennità; la Nuova Roma ha sempre avuto gli stessi patroni dell'Antica: Pietro e Paolo, la cui festa è ancora oggi preceduta da una «quaresima» che comincia subito dopo l'ottava di Pentecoste," "Liturgia patristica orientale, in: A. Quacquarelli (ed.), *Complementi interdisciplinari di patrologia,* (Città Nuova, Roma 1989) 647.

50. See Janson, *History of Art*, 160-166.

51. H. Maguire, *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art.* Published for: The College Art Association of America by The Pennsylvania State University Press,(University Park and London 1987) 6.

52. R. Beny & P. Gunn, *The Churches of Rome*, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1981) 109-125.

As a matter of fact, the churches in Rome which document the iconoclastic crisis go to show both convergent and divergent elements between East and West. As a preface, the Pantheon, which Pope Boniface IV blessed in 609 after receiving it as a gift from Emperor Phocas, reminds us of the continuity of traditions. But especially S. Maria Antiqua is a jewel for documenting the beginning of the crisis, for it was decorated in a way to draw attention to the cult of saints, East and West. The Churches of S. Prassede, S. Cecilia in Trastevere and S. Maria in Domnica were reconstructed by Pope St Paschal I, who reigned from 817 to 824, precisely as a reparation for the insults saints were suffering in the East. And the end of the controversy is shown by the mosiacs in the basilica of S. Marco, rebuilt by Pope Gregory IV in 841.[53] Since, however, all these churches depict not only Christ in human form but also as a lamb, there is here a contrast to the 82nd canon of the Council in Trullo (the Quinisext), which allowed only for the depiction of Christ in human form, considering the lamb to be a dangerous concession to monophysitism.[54]

The controversy about icons made itself felt especially because abuse grew. We have evidence that some Christians dealt with them as communists with Lenin's corpse: they washed them, bathed them in oil, gave them a new covering etc.[55] Probably however the dogmatic consciousness of the fact of icons was established to a large extent by the iconoclastic crisis itself. There is sufficient evidence that previously groups for and against icons existed side by side, but they did not necessarily treat each other as heretics, pretty much as seventeenth century Roman Catholic disputants on grace were not supposed to treat each other as heretics.[56]

One innocent witness as to how the Church at large might have been prior to the development of icons is afforded by the Church of the East, formerly known, polemically, as the Nestorian Church. Since it left the Great Church at an early stage, it remained to a large extent aniconic. Here the kind of art developed in the ambit of this Church is instructive, because in a way it reflects an interesting phase of the development of the Early Church, which in the meantime has been surpassed.[57] Under the Byzantines themselves much was, of course, destroyed during

53. E. Mâle, "Art in Rome during a hundred years of Iconoclasm," *The Early Churches of Rome* (Trans. by D. Buxton) (E. Benn Ltd.; London 1960) 76-97.

54. Space does not allow us here to pursue the origin of the icon itself. At any rate we have to acknowledge the fragmentary character of the information at our disposal. See Bouyer, *Verité des Icônes*, 13-27; Fischer, *Die Ikone*, 21-128.

55. Fischer *Die Ikone*, 71.

56. Cfr H.-G. Thümmel, *Bilderlehre und Bilderstreit.* (Augustinus-Verlag; Würzburg 1991).

57. R.R. Khawam, *L'univers culturel des chrétiens d'Orient.* (Éd. du Cerf; Paris 1987).

the iconoclastic crisis, so that the early icons which were spared destruction, like those of St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, assume an important role. But, both before and after the classical crisis, there were several golden ages in Byzantine art.[58]

There are besides signposts in European art history which help document the loss of the age-long iconic mentality in the West. From a Western viewpoint one would consider Giotto as the watershed, as does E. Gombrich in his very popular history of art. Thus, Giotto's wall-painting in the chapel of the Arena in Padua, "Faith," finished around 1806, manages to transpose in two-dimensions what gives the impression of being three-dimensional. This he attains by portraying a matron who holds a cross in the one hand and a scroll in the other, while resorting to all the tricks of foreshortening of the arm, deep shadows in the folds of the drapery etc. "Nothing like this had been done in a thousand years. Giotto had re-discovered the art of creating the illusion of depth on a flat service."[59] This judgment can be accepted only with the reservations mentioned above.

Again, the gradual loss of the iconic mentality may be documented by comparing an icon of the raising of Lazarus,[60] such as that of Tver' in the fifteenth century,[61] and the same theme handled by Giotto, so long as the same reservations are kept in mind. One notices that the same motifs found in Byzantine art recur. Thus, Lazarus' sisters are crouching on the ground forming a horizontal, the kind of horizontal which in icons usually means death, as opposed to the vertical of life,

58. We may distinguish at least three periods of glory of Byzantine art. The first was under Justinian (Emperor, 527-565), with whom we at once associate the construction of Hagia Sophia. The second is usually considered to have been ushered in by Basil I (Emperor, 867-886), and to have continued till 1025, the death of Basil II (Emperor from 976 to 1025). D.M. Nicol, however, would make it start already under Michael III, emperor from 842 to 867, *The Byzantine Empire*,(Seaby, London 1991) 88. And there was a sort of renaissance at the beginning of the fourteenth century, as witnessed in the Chora church of the Kariye Camii, Istanbul. Of course, other countries, like Russia, have gone through comparable periods of growth and decline, as seen in the schools of Kiev, Novgorod, Pskov, Moscow and Yaroslav.

59. E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, (Phaidon; London [11]1969) 142-143. However, Gombrich later stressed more the Byzantine influence: "It was Byzantine art which ultimately allowed the Italians to leap the barrier that separates sculpture from painting. ... [I]t detracts nothing from Giotto's greatness if we realize that his methods owe much to the Byzantine masters..."; ibid., (15th ed.), 1992, p.150.

60. The examples could be multiplied. Thus, Gombrich himself points out similarities and differences between East and West in Nicola Pisano's "Annunciation, Nativity and Shepherds," completed in 1260 for the marble pulpit of the baptistery in Pisa; cfr *The Story of Art*,[15] pp.148-149. On the level of illuminated manuscripts compare J. Lowden, *Illuminated Prophet Books: A Study of Byzantine Manuscripts of the Major and Minor Prophets*, (The Pennsylvania State University Press; University Park and London 1988) and C. Nordenfalk, *L'enluminure au Moyen Âge*, (A. Skira; Genève 1988).

61. *La Storia della Salvezza* (Centro Studi Russia Cristiana; Milano 1988) 11.

a horizontal-vertical clash which makes much of the message of the "Deposition of Christ's body into the tomb," "The Dormition of the Theotokos" and life-death brushes generally. Giotto makes his characters interact, and introduces, as the case may be, a more naturalistic landscape, furniture and sculpture, thus forcing depth into the pictures.[62]

Another sign of warning is Raffaello. Looking at the "Madonna del Granduca" (1506-1507) one would have to admire the beauty of the mother and the well-built proportions of the child. Here, the painting underlines the human rather than the spiritual side which becomes all the more poignant if one compares it with Dionisij's icon composed roughly about the same time in Russia, where a Mother of the Way (Hodegitria) appears in more severe colours.[63] Later on, in Western art, a reaction will set in against Raffaello. Around the 1800's a group of artists of semi-monastic inspiration who called themselves Nazarenes, hailing from the St Luke Confraternity in Bavaria, settled down in Rome under the leadership of Franz Overbeck. They felt that art had to recapture the Christian inspiration lost since Raffaello. In spite of its rather mediocre quality the Casino Massimi near the Lateran bears signs of their unmistakable programme through their ceiling decorations of Dante and Tasso. In English literature, the term pre-Raphaelites is employed for a movement in the middle of the nineteenth century which brought together a number of London artists, most prominent among whom is Dante Gabriel Rossetti (died 1882), and who aimed at upsetting dominant artistic conventions and returning to a more natural approach to painting, steeped in the kind of medieval imagery prior to Raffaello.[64]

If we move about a hundred years after Raffaello's Madonna we can already see the initiation of that dissolution of forms which will bug much of modern art. In Caravaggio (died 1610), this dissolution meant the translation of substances into light and shadow. With Caravaggio the abandonment of Byzantine motifs becomes more complete, a means of accelerating the dissolution of substance. Thus, when he was commissioned to produce a picture of St Matthew, Caravaggio painted a morose-looking old man, who did not seem to find writing much to his liking, and whose hand the angel next to him has to guide to avoid the worse. The whole production caused an uproar, and Caravaggio had to withdraw his painting,

62. F. Baumgart, *Piccola storia dell'arte*, (Mondadori, Milano 1976) 161-162. But, with reference to E. Gombrich's (*Story of Art*,[11] 146), Bøtnes rightly points out: "If we regard Giotto's gestural expressionism from a Byzantine point of view, however, it cannot be described as a revolution in painting, as is done by those historians who view the picture exclusively in the light of Western tradition," *Visions of Glory* 101.

63. Babolin, *Icona e Conoscenza*, pp.26-30.

64. The Nazarenes distinguished between the earlier and the later Raffaello. See Stichel, *Die Geburt Christi in der russischen Ikonenmalerei* 145.

replacing it by something more hieratic and traditional, now found in S. Luigi dei Francesi.[65] The same happened to Caravaggio's Koimesis: he depicted Our lady bloated as after an arduous agony, perhaps to tell us that the experience of God, far from being pompous, is to be found in the daily measures of life, thus rendering more justice to the human side of the experience of God. But this picture, too, proved too much for those who commissioned it, and it had to be withdrawn.

If we move yet a couple of centuries we see that the substantial configuration of the human has been lost. This defiguration of the human is at the opposite end of the spectrum than the transfiguration promised by the icon.

And now some conclusions.

Even if it becomes imperative to draw a line between East and West there is enough communality that cannot be ignored.

(1) Prior to the development of the icon there was a Christian art, exemplified in the mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore, and even earlier mosaics, which cannot be simply dismissed as irrelevant, inferior or rationalistic.

(2) Spontaneously there seems to have been common strands of iconic consciousness in both East and West to warrant the claim that, in spite of all due pluralism, the icon was possessed in common in the first millennium and beyond.[66]

THIRD PART
FIRST BEARINGS IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

If we propose to consider somewhat separately the origins of Christian art and thought it is certainly not in order to divide these two terrains. They belong together. But, precisely by taking into account some general considerations about both we are in a position to draw a parallel, instructive, we hope, for all that has to do with separating and uniting.

Christ-orientation and Christian reflection

Art and thought going together, their real origin is the Christ-orientation of the first Christians. The pastoral needs for a Christian reflection organized along the lines of analogous contemporary enterprises were met but slowly. First Christians wrote as eye-witnesses, or gave witness to what they had heard, to enable those who had had no direct experience of the historical Jesus to believe. In his prologue

65. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (15 ed.), 12-13.

66. Cfr Bouyer, *Vérité des icônes*, 109-116.

to the Gospel (1,1- 4) Luke alludes to precisely this need that arose among the congregations. John is more explicit and states at the epilogue of his Gospel that he wrote in order that people may believe (John 20,31). By his time, there were not too many people around who had had a direct experience of Jesus before Easter, and this was steadily becoming a problem. How is it possible to believe all the marvels that were being recounted of Jesus without ever having met Him? The story of Thomas' doubt (John 20,24-29) is related precisely within such a catechetical setting. We notice that eight days had elapsed, some indication that Sunday was fast becoming a recognized institution by the time John wrote. In the story Thomas perhaps stands for the type of irregular Church-goer who pretends nonetheless to experience the whole splendour of religion with a minimum of effort. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!" (John 20,29) Thomas' confession represents the climax of John's Gospel, but it is a warning against those who pretend that the fundaments of faith have to be anchored in the immediate seeing characteristic of curiosity.

Christians moved next to the defence of the faith against its cultured or dominant despisers. At first blush faith and the dominant philosophy will always seem at odds with each other. But there is a lasting truth behind this apparent contradiction. Society, in part or at large, frequently raises claims as to the feasibility of the faith, proclaims as dogmas claims to fulfilment as a necessary concomitant of human endeavor and perfect transparency of the mystery that human beings are. Instead, there is no coercive philosophical premise to justify such claims. Life, as it presents itself to the beholder, is what it is, and nothing else; it would raise eyebrows if everything were transparent. This all the more so when we thread the realm of mystery, which is that of religion on which theology reflects. Already the fact that theological syntheses do not satisfy completely should put us on our guard against any simplistic rendition of reality which would not deliver the truth but compromise on it. Little wonder, then, that early Christian thought was even at times iconoclastic against dominant worldviews, something which should prod us on not to seek total intelligibility in any theological enterprise. What has Jerusalem got to do with Athens indeed! so long as this recourse to mystery does not spell out intellectual lethargy or spiritual insensitivity.

Apologetic or not, Christians sought to respond to the catechetical needs of the steadily growing community, whether through threat from outside or from inside the community. To the recurrence of iconoclasm in theology there is thus a positive note: whether demythologization, death-of-God theologies, new and ever newer orthodoxies, liberation and protest theologies,[67] they all live from the

67. That these theologies need not be iconoclastic in any bad sense of the word is shown by the fact that scripture itself practises them.

inadequacy of the human word to exhaust the Word of God, even after it became tangible in Jesus Christ. These tensions did not lead early Christians, with their very rudimentary theology, to despair of human effort to explain and proclaim the truth, but rather finds its salutary vector in the liturgy. In the celebration of worship within the church everybody had his place.

Reflection on the image is a condensation of early Christian reflection generally.

However, in order to be able to make any headway, we have to restrict our theme to one problematic which is sufficiently comprehensive. In this sense, no better theme could present itself than early Christians' reflections on the image. Indeed, it represents one way of keeping track of both developments in Christian art and thought, theology and spirituality; perhaps the best way. Here converge trinitarian, christological and anthropological considerations. Thus, there are two texts which immediately come to mind when one talks about the image. The first is about the first human parents being created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1,26-27); the second describes Christ as the image of the invisibile God (Col 1,15). As a matter of fact, both texts occupy a central part in the Fathers' efforts to create a viable theology.

Reflections on the image

As the great patrologist A. Grillmeier points out, no passage of Scripture was so important for the theologians of the third and fourth centuries as Col 1,15.[68] And yet, among the Fathers of the Church, St Clement of Alexandria (died 215) hardly made any use of Col 1,15. This may perhaps be explained on account of the abuse the Gnostic sect of the Valentinians made of it[69] then, for the influential Valentians, Christ was the icon of the pleroma. At any rate, the icon certainly does not refer to the body in Clement, whereas St Irenaeus of Lyons (died c. 200) clearly takes Gen 1,26-27 as his point of departure rather than Col 1,15[70] and identifies the image of the invisible God with the incarnate Son of God. For Origen (died c. 254), the image of God can only refer to God's invisibility:[71] indeed, the relationship between prototype and image obtains in the relationship between God the Father and the

68. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, I (Herder; Freiburg i.Br. 1979) 118.

69. Grillmeier, ibid., 105. Also: P.-Th. Camelot, "La theologie de l'image de Dieu," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 3 (1956) 445.

70. Grillmeier, ibid., 104. Also Camelot, ibid., 446.

71. Grillmeier, ibid., 107.

Son. Therefore the icon is the Logos, and not the incarnate Word of God; Christ's soul is the image of this image; and man is only "according to the image."[72]

When we turn to St Athanasius of Alexandria (died 373), although he continued the Alexandrian tradition to which he was beholden, we see a certain weakening of this tradition. Since the Arians abused the icon in order to deny the divinity of the Logos, he stressed instead his divine status. Indeed, had the Arians not abused the term icon it might as well have been chosen to express the *homoousion* in Orthodoxy.[73] In order to counter the heretics Athanasius stresses that our own imitation of God never amounts to resembling Him "*kat'ousian*," that is the likeness by nature reserved to the Son. The struggle with heretics did not prevent St Gregory of Nyssa (died ç.395) from making ample use of image in his theology and spirituality, the "image" and "likeness" of Gen 1,26-27 referring respectively to the static aspect (image as the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem*) and the dynamic aspect (the progress in between) of the same reality.[74]

It might be interesting to note the fate of the image in the West. St Augustine (died 430) speaks of *vestigia Trinitatis*, anthropological aspects which may be traced back to the Trinity — the trinitarian frame of mind of the human, we might translate. And St Thomas' *Summa Theologiae* is based on the *exitus-reditus* scheme, i.e. the basic conception of creation issuing from God's hands in order to return to Him, a scheme which evokes the whole approach of the exemplar and its image.[75] Finally, in mystics like Meister Eckhart (died 1327) and John Tauler (died 1361) the image of God plays a central part. Since Luther admired and made use of these thinkers, aspects of the theology of the image offer us possibilities of dialogue between East and West, and even in the inner-West dialogue.[76] The reconstruction of Europe has something to guide it: a deepening of that image which in many ways is at the roots of its origin but also of its divisions.

72. Camelot, "L'image de Dieu," 448.

73. Ibid., Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 110; Camelot, ibid., 450. Note, however, the judgment of Ch. v. Schönborn, *L'icône du Christ. Fondements théologiques* (Éd. Universitaires; Fribourg Suisse) 29, on the great importance of St Athanasius for the theology of the image: "en défendant, contre l'arianisme, la notion paradoxale d'une image parfaite et consubstantielle du Père il a maintenu le réalité même de la Révélation. Si le Fils est l'image parfaite de son Père, image resplendissante qui ne remit en rien l'effet de son modèle, alors nous avons réellement accès au Père, alors le Père s'est pleinement révélé à nous. Nous touchons ici à la racine ultime du culte des images: Dieu possède une image parfaite de lui-même, dont il est le générateur, et qui ne lui est en rien inférieure."

74. Camelot, ibid., 465.

75. Camelot, ibid., 468.

76. P. Fransen, "Dogmengeschichtliche Entfaltung der Gnadenlehre," *Mysterium Salutis* IV/2 (Benzinger; Einsiedeln 1973) 699-711.

Now, since it is often claimed that East and West went separate ways at an early period, we have to distinguish between what is correct in such an assertion and what is less so. If we take sacramental theology we see that St Augustine remained faithful to the pre-Nicene tradition. Thus, if we were to take the sacrament of penance, it is Origen who develops a theology where reconciliation with God is the real symbol for God's forgiveness, and in this, though nearly anticipated by St Cyprian, he will in fact be complemented by Augustine.[77] The very fact that Augustine adopted a Platonic conception helped keep him in line, unlike St Ambrose's more realistic conception, a difference of approach which was later to find an echo in the West in the conflict between St Paschasius Radbertus (died c.860) and Ratramnus of Corbie (died c. after 868) in the ninth century.[78] We shall later have occasion to see that in its trinitarian conception Roman Catholic theology at times, while retaining full Orthodoxy, was to weaken somewhat the splendid theology of the real symbol.

The upshot of our considerations at this point, however, is different. Just as we have been able to establish an iconic mentality, obtaining at least in the first millennium between East and West, so, too, in questions of theology, we notice the existence of the "communitarian theology" of the Fathers. In the absence of highly evolved structures in the early Church we are struck by a number of factors. The presence of many centres, several of which claimed apostolic origin, and a spontaneous conformity to the essentials of faith, account for this remarkable phenomenon which has been called "the communitarian theology of the Fathers."[79] More specifically, this spontaneous concordance was based on the Word of God, especially as recorded in the canonical scriptures; monasticism as the expression of the free access of all to the highest spirituality of the community (in various ways, whether literally as monks with a life-style that privileges growth in the "likeness of God," or "monks in spirit," i.e. married or single persons seeking perfection in the bosom of the community) and the liturgy as the normative moment of the Church's faith and worship. As "means of communication" there prevailed the use of signs, symbols and numbers,[80] but there was at the same time a sustained effort to elaborate a critical text of the scriptures and even translate it into the lingua franca. The names of Origen and St Jerome (died 420) are but two names in this group.

77. K. Rahner, "Das Sakrament der Buße als Wiederversöhnung mit der Kirche," *Schriften zur Theologie* , VIII (Benzinger; Einsiedel 1967) 459-462; idem, Frühe Bußgeschichte XI, (Benzinger; Einsiedeln 1973).

78. L. Ott, *Grundriß der Dogmatik*, (Herder, Freiburg i.Br ^{8}1970) 446.

79. A. Quacquarelli, "Parola e immagine nella teologia comunitaria dei Padri," in: idem (ed.), *Complementi interdisciplinari di patrologia*, (Città Nuova; Roma 1989) 109-110, 178-183.

80. Ibid., 125-178.

The pre-Nicene synthesis

The spontaneous concord referred to above finds its best exemplification in the period of time prior to the First Ecumenical Council, Nicaea I (325).[81] Biblically, this accord lives from faith in Jesus Christ as the tangible image of the invisible God, His Father. Spiritually, it lives on monasticism, in letter or in spirit, that promoted a view of this world as a parable of, and a preparation for, the world to come. Liturgically, an iconic spirit was preserved, if not so much literally by means of icons, given the lack of means to produce them and the need to stave off idolatry,[82] then at least in spirit by making out of the signs constitutive of worship norms for belief and behavior.[83] In which sense, we will have to see later on.

In this respect, it is interesting to see image in relationship to the emergence of canonicity in the early Church. The emergence of a canon of books depends less on the challenge posed by gnosticism and its search for secret revelations and sealed books,[84] and more on the the view of the experience of Christianity as somehow normative and on tradition as the global vision of the faith.

Conclusions

(1) Prior to Nicaea I there was a spontaneity of communal feeling, reflected in theology as well as art, which did not prejudice the development of a healthy pluralism.

(2) Its backbone was the theology of [real] symbol — or icon.

(3) Elements of this iconic communal thinking were lost on both sides, East and West, preparing the way for schism.

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81. E. Fortmann, *The Triune God. A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, (Hutchison; London 1972) 37-61.

82. It is to be noted that the first grand representations of the Pantocrator arise as a consequence of the need to combat Arianism, which had denied the divinity of the Logos, Schönborn, *L'icône du Christ*, 29-30.

83. L. Bouyer, *La spritualité du Nouveau Testament des Pères*, (Aubier; Paris 1960).

84. F. Stuhlhofer, *Der Gebrauch der Bibel von Jesus bis Euseb*, (Brockhaus Verlag; Wuppertal 1988) 75-78.