



THE ICONIC CHARACTER OF CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE: LOGOS AND ICON*

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One way of interpreting is to classify. Precisely historical hermeneutics implies the exegesis of a whole epoch, sometimes of the whole drive of Church history. Pitrim Sorokin, the noted Russian sociologist, pointed out that the habitual divisions of history in antiquity, dark ages, middle ages, modern times etc. are very onesided and even colonialistic, since they reflect only one type of experience, usually that of Western Europeans. Thus, we might think that printing-presses ushered in a new age in civilisation, but we forget that countries like China, Japan and Korea possessed them long before Europeans.

In order to shake oneself loose of prejudices one has to re-interpret history by classifying it afresh. One such classification is to divide the whole of church history as 1. posing the problem of the image, or rather, more exactly, proposing a special kind of solution for the relation between word and image; 2. deposing the image or debunking certain tacit assumptions involved in the acceptance of this particular relation; and 3. reproposing the image, i.e. the attempt to start afresh and restore the image to its original intent and heal divisions between word and image on all levels.

Expressed in more concrete terms, the first refers to the age when Christianity, grappling in the dark against the forces of evil, managed to canvass enough space for itself so as to be able to attain visibility and become more present for its contemporaries. The second is the age of crises, which put into question the agreement passed on from the classical times of communitarian theology; such was iconoclasm and such will Protestantism prove to be, for which the tendency is not to interpret reality in terms of the real symbol.¹ But the last period, in which a new and comprehensive formula of agreement is sought, re-proposes the icon as a launching-pad for new discussions, a round table for ecumenism and as far as general human culture is concerned, the retrieval of much that was lost over the centuries in which collective charity cooled off.

* This is the third of a series of three studies on iconology. The other two articles appeared in *Melita Theologica* Vol. XLIII No.2 and Vol. XLIV No.1.

1. Cfr Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 13-16.

This way of looking at things rehashes once more the question of the relationship between the iconic dimension and the Word of God, treasured precisely in those cultures in which the iconic dimension has been curtailed. A good way of starting is to begin with the New Testament.

Logos and Icon

The New Testament uses a number of designations for Jesus Christ. Chief among these are: Logos (Greek for "word") and Icon (Greek for "image"). As the Word the Son is capable of revealing through the Spirit who the Father is. Word means: the expressiveness of God in person; indeed, the second Person of the Trinity. Image underlines that the invisible God becomes visible and tangible after the Incarnation. For this reason we say with that tradition of Eastern theology which antedates the first Council of Nicaea (325): only the Son can become man, because He is the Word.

If we want to gauge how much Western theology departed from the pre-Nicene consensus or communitarian theology of the Fathers we need only consider what St Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) says about the possibility of God revealing Himself. In the context of the more general question of article five, "Does each Person have the power to assume?", Thomas raises the more specific question (number three) about "The mode of union on the part of the Person assuming."² In his reply Thomas reaches the conclusion: "[W]e must acknowledge that the Father or the Holy Spirit could have assumed flesh, even as the Son did so."

So in the tradition which started with St Augustine and was continued right till St Thomas and beyond, up to our own days, we find a weakening of the insightful theology of the image elaborated in pre-Nicene times. K. Rahner (d. 1984) in our own days, criticizing St Augustine, and trying to reach back to the ante-Nicene consensus, formulated it this way: When God, without stopping to be God, wants to become something other than Himself, then he becomes man. He added: only the Son can become man, because He is the Word, just as the Father is at the origin of everything, the Giver of every gift, and the Spirit is this gift.³ On account of this sharply delineated trinitarian theology of ante-Nicene times, in which the various roles of the divine Persons are not blurred, we cannot avoid the conclusion that, granted that the icon as an identifiable cultimage took centuries to develop, there

2. *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 48: "The Incarnate Word," 3a. 16 Latin text, English translation, Introduction, Notes, Appendices & Glossary by R.J. Hennessey (Blackfriars, Eyre & Spottiswoode; London 1976) 99.
3. Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens*, 140-142.

was a theology of the icon, before there was the icon. That is why we prefer to call this theology the theology of the real symbol. At any rate, the theology of the icon as a sacred image was contingent on Christianity's impact on the new way of approaching God and world, not the other way round.

Liturgy: the first inculturation of Christianity

Naturally, this theology of the icon as the theology of the real symbol could develop only because it found the right habitat, and that was official Christian worship. Indeed, the first inculturation or Sitz-im-Leben of the Christian message is the liturgy. More specifically, it is within the context of baptism and the Eucharist that the doctrine of the Trinity and the hymns dedicated to Christ are elaborated, as well as the offer of a brand new life in Jesus Christ by sharing, through grace in His divine life, celebrated.⁴

This may be illustrated by some of the early records known to us through the Bible. For this purpose we may turn to St Paul and St John. We have already come across some uses Paul makes of icon, both to designate Christ's status as well as the faithful's relationship to Christ. The note of the baptismal liturgy is sounded in the theme of the configuration with Him through baptism (cfr Rom 6 and 8) as well as the image of the baptized as incorporated in the one body of Christ (1 Cor 12; 12,13).

Remarkably enough, John does not use the term "icon" or image for the Son, but he uses expressions for seeing (e.g., *horan*, *idein*, *blephein*, *theorein*) in a way which is equivalent: for example: John 1,14; 1,18.⁵ John, whose disciple was St Polycarp of Smyrna (d.156), whose disciple in turn was Irenaeus, was the first to sense the threat the dualistic threat of gnosticism posed for the Church and to combat it. See especially the beginning of 1 John. But the upshot of John's Gospel is God's *doxa* or glory become manifest (cfr John 2,11 and the other signs).⁶

The iconic character of Christian language

Already a word can be an icon and language thus becomes iconic. The words used by a poet come to symbolize a greater reality than words used for pragmatic

4. P. Schwanz, *Imago Dei als christologisch-anthropologisches. Problem in der Geschichte der Alten Kirche von Paulus bis Clemens von Alexandrien*, (Halle a.d; Saale 1970) 19.

5. Schwanz, *Ibid*, 59-60.

6. See Schwanz, *Imago Dei als christologisch-anthropologisches. Problem in der Geschichte der Alten Kirche von Paulus bis Clemens von Alexandrien*.

needs ever could. Such words are capable of evoking the whole of reality.⁷ They will therefore seem unclear to those who prefer clear-cut definitions at the expense of depth. As H. Bergson (d. 1940) has pointed out, if the scientist can put *t* for time in his equations, this is because he puts out of time what is essential to it: its surprises, its different velocities according to the various emotions, its duration, and in effect reduces time to a variant of space which one can manipulate for purposes of control of events, forecast of phenomena like earthquakes and so forth.⁸ But the more depth one puts into a word the more difficult it is to manipulate, it eludes our grasp and it is we rather who are inspired by it. One such word is "priest." The worldwide discussion about ordination of women to the priesthood is but a testcase of the iconic character of Christian language.⁹

But in order that depth might not become tantamount to unclarity a few preliminary distinctions are necessary. First of all, in the nature of the priesthood itself. There can be but one priesthood or ultimate mediation between God and humanity, and that is the God-Man Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2,5). But nonetheless we distinguish between two different participations in this one mediation. There is the priesthood of all the faithful on the basis of their baptism (1 Pt 2,410), on which token they are entitled to share in the sacrifice of praise offered by the Church. Besides this there is the ministerial priesthood, the presbyterate, to which one can accede only on the basis of a call which creates an iconic relationship between Christ the priest and His minister.¹⁰ Many find it indeed remarkable that Christ's Mother should not qualify for the ministerial priesthood.

In order to appreciate better the import of this argument we have to see it in the light of arguments for and against the ordination of women. In its favour it is claimed that no theological argument can be advanced against it — except, that is, for tradition. But traditions can be changed and must be changed in view of a changed sociological situation. Thus slavery existed in Christian countries right until last century and the abolition of slavery in 1833 associated with the name of

7. See K. Rahner, "Priesterliche Existenz," *Schriften zur Theologie*, III (Benzinger, Einsiedeln 1956) 285-312.
8. H. Bergson, "Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience," *Oeuvres*, (Presses Universitaires de France; Paris 1970) 126-130.
9. T. Hopko (ed.), *Women and the Priesthood*, (St Vladimir's; New York 1983) 27.
10. In "The Three Widows" Bishop Kallistos Ware points out that the function of an icon consists in making present "a spiritual reality that surpasses, but of which it acts as the sign." Thus, Christ and His saints "are present as active participants in the liturgy through their icons in the church; and Christ is likewise present in the liturgy through his icon the priest;" in Hopko, *Women and the Priesthood*, 24.

W. Wilberforce. Likewise, too, the emancipation of women requires their admission to the ministerial priesthood. Now, first of all, the first argument seems to misunderstand the nature and role of tradition, which is the transmission of the global vision of Christianity from generation to generation so as to assure living continuity with Christ — to see to it that Christ's Christianity will have a future. Indeed, the form in which this argument is often repeated is revealing. "There is no theological argument against the ordination of women": such a statement is a typical rationalistic statement of those who consider Christianity to be settled on the basis of arguments. But another anthropological misunderstanding underlies the second or sociological argument about emancipation. Slavery is the result of sin, whereas male and female is the result of God's creative act.¹¹

In the context of these three studies we may barely mention that the interpretation of history assumed by these two arguments is anything but satisfying. First of all, it is not the first time that the Church is facing such a crisis. In early gnosticism the presence of Simon Magus' Helen, and, later on, the presence of other variants of Sophia or other forms of female deities, and the role of women in Montanism, a second-century heresy, remind us that right from the start the Church had to take sides on the issue. Lack of documents comparable to later Church praxis may easily mislead us anachronistically into thinking that the Church took no decision. Equally onesided is the prime analogate used in the sociological argument. Early Christian inscriptions bear witness to "liberti" who thank God that their Christian masters freed them. Around the year 217 a slave from Trastevere, Rome, could become Pope in spite of financial problems which landed him for a time in prison.¹² And an order like that of St Benedict (d. 547) upset the neat feudal distinctions, for a monk who had the requisite talent could become abbot.

The basic problem with the type of argumentation we are criticizing, however, is the loss of the theology of the symbol and a consequent deviation from a communitarian theology of the Fathers. It is the symbolic worth of things that is here at stake. Thus, in terms of the first kind of priesthood, that of all the faithful, the Mother of God undoubtedly surpasses all other merely human beings. But in the case of the ministerial priesthood the iconic relationship that should obtain between the one represented and the one representing does not obtain in the case of the Theotokos. The reason is that Christ's being a male has something symbolic about it. Since being male and being female are not interchangeable roles, Christ's male sex has something essential to say about His function. To deny that is to

11. K. Ware, *Ibid*, 1617; Hopko, "On the Male Character of the Christian Priesthood," in Hopko (ed.), *Ibid*, 101.

12. Much of our information on Pope Callixtus derives from his rival Hippolyt's *Philosophoumena*.

indulge in a form of gnostic dualism, for whom matter and material modifications of our personality are not eligible or even relevant for salvation.¹³ Even culturally, the Elizabethan practice of having a woman's role played by a male was found to be disturbing, which it most definitely is. Likewise, only a male can represent Hamlet, and only a male can represent Jesus Christ.¹⁴

What is said about the ministerial priesthood holds true of the other sacraments in their different contexts. A sacrament is an iconic structure. It makes present what really took place at the same time pointing to the future of God's transfigured world, the eschaton. The vocation of the ordained priest, in the felicitous expression of A. Schmemmann, is to have no vocation but rather minister to the femininity of the world, to a world hungering for the good word that will orientate it, heal it and uplift it. The world, united and powerful though it might be, cannot suffice unto itself, needs to receive salvation. This is symbolized in the communion rite where in certain rites even the celebrating priest receives communion from another. The various sacraments are but an explication of this femininity, which should be understood in a thoroughly positive sense. For His own Mother Christ could find no greater praise than that of listening to the Word of God (Mk 3,35; Lk 11, 2728).¹⁵

A comparison between two Pentecost icons may here help illustrate the point. In a magnificent fifteenth-century icon from the School of Movgorod we have the apostles divided into two groups around an arch, with St Paul present and the Mother of Jesus absent. A recent iconograph, G. Mezzalira, has reproduced pretty much the same icon of Pentecost, with the Theotokos in the middle. In my opinion, in the former icon Mary is much more present than in the latter. Then she represents, according to the Gospel saying (Luke 8,21), and the part she generally plays in the Gospels, the Church herself who listens to the Word of God. In Vatican II, it was rather Pope Paul VI than the Council itself who wanted to give Mary the title of Mother of the Church. Certainly, the title has a thoroughly acceptable sense, but the more basic symbolism of the first purely human creature to be deified is somewhat blurred.¹⁶

13. D. Belonick, "The Spirit of the Female Priesthood," in Hopko (ed.), *Ibid*, 145-152.

14. Cfr Hopko (ed.), *Women and the Priesthood*.

15. Cfr A. Schmemmann, *The World as Sacrament*, (Darton, Longman & Todd, London). Also: R. Taft, *Beyond East and West*, (Pastoral Press: Washington D.C. 1984) 101-109.

16. Cfr M.G. Muzj, *Trasfigurazione. Introduzione alla contemplazione delle icone*, (Paoline; Milano 1987); *Le dodici feste del ciclo liturgico. Icone dipinte da G. Mezzalira nello spirito della tradizione russa* (Asterisco; Milano 1990); K. Rahner, *Kleines Konzilskompendium*, 121.

The range of the iconic character of Christian language

To grasp that the theology of the icon as the theology of practically the whole of theology we would have to go through the various treatises of theology. We would then realize that there is hardly an aspect of theology which is not in one way or another directly involved. An author who has tried to spell out these implications is K. Rahner, especially in his article, "The Theology of the Symbol."¹⁷ Rahner sees in the theology of the real symbol, which he here sketches, the quintessence of Catholic theology.

He suggests, besides, that there are here points of contact with Byzantine theology. For the purposes of our studies, the theology of the real symbol may be shown to agree on essential points with that of the icon.

Reality is symbolical in its very structure, because it can only be itself by expressing itself. In the immanent Trinity the Logos is the real symbol of the Father. However, the main chapter of a theology of the real symbol would have to be reserved to christology, because in the incarnate Logos God becomes visible. How central symbol is for theology may be gathered from the Church's teaching on the sacraments. Just as Christ is the primeval sacrament in relationship to the Church, so is the Church the primary sacrament in relationship to the other sacraments. Nor does the domain of the sacraments end with the eschaton, for the humanity of Christ will mediate the Beatific vision. Lastly, the body itself is the actualization of the soul and is thus its real symbol.¹⁸

Conclusions

(1) As we have already seen in article two, there was a theology of the icon even before there were icons (at least as a largescale societal phenomenon). That the theology of the icon as a sacred image is not identical with the theology of the real symbol may be seen from the fact that in Origen we find both a theology of the real symbol as well as a streak of thought against the icons. At any rate, the theology of the icon as the theology of the real symbol developed in a way independent of the use of icons.

(2) The understanding of reality in general in the East is sacramental.¹⁹ This will have consequences for sacred art (which is iconic), for philosophy (based in

17. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, IV (Darton, Longman & Todd; London 1966) 221-226.

18. Cfr *DS*, 902.

19. See Schmemann, *The World as Sacrament*.

principle on real symbol) and for theology (which ought to be sacramental). We have here some criteria to judge both where some major divergences are to be sought as well as what is still held in common between East and West.

(3) Much confusion in modern theology could be removed by a return to the Fathers and the first millennium, and more specifically to the theology of the icon as real symbol. Of this theology of the real symbol the icon as sacred image is itself a symbol.

PART 2

Recasting theology along the lines of Hearing and Seeing

We need only read certain passages in Scripture carefully to note the importance that is given to hearing and seeing, Word and icon. Thus John 1,14 says: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory." And 1 John 1,13 is more explicit:

"Something which has existed since the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own hands, the Word of life — this is our theme. That life was made visible; we saw it and are giving testimony, declaring to you the eternal life, which was present to the Father and has been revealed to us. We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you too may share our life.

Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.²⁰

Such passages are typical of the Johannine corpus, but are by no means foreign to other writers.

Thus St Luke not only reports Christ's blessing for those who hear the Word of God, but also puts the emphasis on the opening of the eyes of the blind in Christ's first sermon held in Nazareth (Luke 4,1819),²¹ which finds a twofold culmination in the "spectacle" (*theoria*: Luke 23,48) of Calvary and in the opening of the disciples of Emmaus' eyes (Lk 24,31). And St Paul, who is so famous for his insistence on the Word of God, and its sobering effect in its association with the cross (1 Cor 1,23), has passages about being transformed into God's glory which

20. *The New Jerusalem Bible*, (Darton, Longman & Todd; London 1985) 2011.

21. D. Hamm, "Sight to the Blind: Vision as metaphor in Luke," *Biblica* 87(1986) 457-477.

show that he too used both dimensions of seeing and hearing. Thus he says: "Faith comes from hearing" (Rom 10,17), but he also says: "Those whom God has justified He has also glorified" (Rom 8,30) by transfiguring them in the image of His Son.²²

The relevance of so much talk about seeing and hearing is that they are in danger of going asunder as a result of sin. Let us note first some cultural presuppositions for the divorce between hearing and seeing. We have the phenomenon of dead languages. When a language is no longer spoken but only dead, then we have a dead language. In the case of Latin this distinction between spoken word and written word, therefore between hearing and seeing, starts becoming acute after the death of Quintilian in 95 A.D.²³ This same fracture between hearing and seeing is at the root of schisms; it is well-known that Rome and Constantinople started drifting apart when they stopped using the same language. However, one should not over-evaluate the mere fact of a common language in the sense of grammar and syntax

Many a civil war has been waged in the same language; and, on the contrary, people without a common language are capable of communicating marvellously. A German woman visited my mother, who speaks only Maltese, and they could chat in their native languages for two hours and enjoy every bit of it besides! After all, have not we Latins talked with God in a dead language for centuries on end?

Nonetheless, in spite of the danger of oversimplification, we may now attempt to sketch some dominant (and recessive) traits in an EastWest typology. The East is more characterized by vision. Indeed, as typical heresy is usually adduced monophysitism. Naturally, we have learnt nowadays to draw many fine distinctions in order not to identify the christological heresy in the abstract with any one group of Christians previously called polemically "Monophysites." In the West the dominant characteristic is hearing, and the typical heresy is protestantism.²⁴ Here, too, one would have to distinguish carefully between the different groups. The very breakup of a Christian Europe, therefore, was not only a function of the dichotomy between seeing and hearing, but contributed in its turn to the widening of the gulf between both.

22. Cfr G. Lohfink, "Das Weinwunder zu Kana. Eine Auslegung von Joh 2:112," *Geist und Leben* 57(1984) 168182, especially pp.180-182.

23. Cfr W.J. Ong, *La presenza della parola*, (Mulino; Bologna 1970).

24. R. Hotz, *Sakramente — im Wechselspiel zwischen Ost und West*, (Benzinger, EinsiedelnZürichKöln 1979) 48-49.

In the wake of this widening gulf we advert some iconoclastic traits of the Enlightenment. On the whole this intellectual movement was to contribute to the awakening of the human mind from its own lethargy, and in this sense has established some standards of the critical use of reason from which there can be no return. It was, however, sometimes accompanied by certain iconoclastic traits, not only in trying to suppress pilgrimages, veneration for relics and contemplative religious orders, but especially in its distrust of authority and revealed religion generally. Naturally, these negative phenomena were not always present in the same measure, and quite a number of Christian intellectuals managed to redeem many of the benefits of the Enlightenment. But, as W. Kasper points out, we need an Enlightenment of the Enlightenment, because the historical Enlightenment suffered from a naive faith in reason whose bankruptcy we now see more clearly than ever.²⁵

If one wanted to trace back the processes which led to the divorce of sight and hearing, as well as those factors which accounted for their happy union, one would have to write an ecumenical history of seeing and hearing. One would then have to analyze the role of *mysterion* in Greek theology and its relation to Neoplatonism with its prototype-image dialectic. This implies an intrinsic relationship between both, so that the prototype remains present in the image. The old Latin understanding of image as "similitude" loosened the relationship somewhat, for it was in danger of watering down the relationship to a matter of imitation.²⁶ Here, too, however, one should be careful not to press the point. As I. Hausherr has pointed out, the imitation-motif was thoroughly present in Byzantine theology, so that contradistinguishing a supposedly Western imitation-of-Christ approach with an allegedly Eastern more intrinsic life-in-Christ approach needs some serious modifications if it is not to become misleading.²⁷ Other stages through which such an ecumenical history of seeing and hearing passes by would have to include hearing and seeing in the context of the spiritual senses (Origen [d. c.254], St Bonaventure [d. 1274], and their role in the discernment of spirits; the contribution of St Augustine (d. 430) and the Reformation; that of St Thomas (d. 1274) and the Council of Trent; Catholic influence on Orthodox creedal statements as a result of the Reformation and which is especially felt in the doctrine of the sacraments; and the doctrine on the sacraments in the context of Catholic and Orthodox dialogue etc.²⁸

25. Cfr W. Kasper, *Eine Einführung in den Glauben*, (Grünwald; Mainz ⁵1977) 24-25.

26. Hotz, *Ibid*, 50-67.

27. I. Hausherr, "L'imitation de Jésus Christ dans la spiritualité byzantine," *Mélanges offerts à R.P. Ferdinand Cavallera* (Bibliothèque de l'Institut Catholique; Toulouse 1948) 231-259.

28. Hotz, *Ibid*, 67-138.

Some systematical considerations concerning a reconstruction along the lines of seeing and hearing

There can be no doubt that seeing enjoys, in absolute terms, the primacy among the senses.²⁹ Our language expresses this primacy in terms of sight, insight and intuition. These are all words which, in the respective ways we use our faculties, express the metaphysical primacy of sight over hearing. Besides, there is the eschatological primacy in what we call the Beatific Vision, greater than which no happiness could be conceived. All these instances point to terminal phases, peak moments, definitive results.

It is quite different when we turn to our immediate problems in our world here below and are confronted with the myriad instances which seem to militate against the easy assumption of definitive answers. Here, it is the prevalence of hearing that holds sway. It is true that seeing expresses the domination of the objection, the abolition of curiosity and the acquisition of a special relationship to the object seen in a sort of identification between the beholder and the seen, but this kind of cognitive satisfaction remains a relatively rare example in the world of faith. Much on which confidence rests is not amenable to direct verification, but depends rather on testimony and the truthfulness of witnesses. In the normal case, what is most precious is not superficially available to satisfy us immediately, but requires from us change, that we adapt ourselves to it, that we transform ourselves so as to be able to receive its form. This dependence on witnesses is a dramatic example of the factual historical priority of hearing over sight.

Examples of the historical prevalence of hearing in this world are presented by Israel, where the loss of the temple led to an exquisite theology of the Word, found in DeuteroIsaias; and by Protestantism, where loss of unity and of the link with real symbol and iconic consciousness led to a strong accentuation of a theology of the Word. For human beings living in the world this historical prevalence can at times even look as a permanent state. Thus, even in Catholic theology, a sacrament is an *exhibitive word*. St Thomas describes a sacrament as a *signum rememorativum, demonstrativum* and *prognosticum*, i.e. has a threefold time dimension: a commemorative, an exhibitive and an anticipatory. But, corresponding to the human being's constitution as body and soul, the sacrament is composed of both a matter and a form (word). Through the word the sacrament is saved from being only matter; since the word comes from the outside, the sacrament is thus introduced into the historical dimension.³⁰

29. K. Rahner, "Vom Sehen und Hören," *Glaube, der die Erde liebt*, (Herder, Freiburg i.Br. 1966) 159-165.

30. Cfr K. Rahner, "Einleitende Bemerkungen zur allgemeinen Sakramentenlehre bei Thomas von

In this world the symbol is subordinated to the word. Any set of symbols is ultimately subordinated, in the transfigured world shown by the icon, to the Word of God through which the Word is transmitted. The glory we see through the long maturation of transfiguration is not a glory readily available for curious egoists, but is rather a glory perceivable to whomsoever is capable of discerning the Word of God from other competing claimants. But we cannot really discern God's Word without perceiving at the same time some of its splendours. Here we have yet another instance of the interrelatedness of seeing and hearing. We cannot think without images. As I. Kant (d. 1804) put it, images without concepts are empty; but concepts without images are blind. An example taken from daily life sometimes adduced to illustrate this interrelatedness is dreams. We usually recount our dreams by imposing on them some sort of logical order, or at least a coherent explanation.³¹ Likewise, we cannot discern God's will for us without having at least a ray of God's glory shine upon us.

The unity of hearing and seeing is guaranteed in the last analysis through the heart from which they emanate. As has been pointed out time and time again the heart has a more inclusive meaning in the East than in the West. It is the principle of unity in theory and practice. This becomes clear if we take a testcase: doing. Here theory and practice should collaborate. Now it is often said that beauty or glory (what is seen) is nothing but the cooperation of truth (what is heard) and goodness

A good word for good works

Ethics cannot be considered independently of worship and doctrine. Unfortunately, precisely this has taken place to a large extent in Western ethics, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, although in various ways. Eastern ethics, on the contrary, tries not to lose sight of the spiritual, liturgical and doctrinal unity of vision into which ethics has to be inserted. We could retrieve once again this heritage, common to both East and West, if the West returned even more than it has done in the recent past, to its patristic sources and the East adopted more of the intellectual progress registered in the Enlightenment. The ethics which is in consonance with the holistic outlook of the East is the ethics of transfigured love.³²

Aquin," *Schriften zur Theologie*, X (Benzinger, Einsiedeln) 397.

31. Cfr A. Backhaus, "Die Neurophysiologie und Theologie des Sehens und der Ikonen," in W. Kasack, 45-61.

32. Cfr V. Guroian, *Transfigured Love*, (Notre Dame Univ. Press; Notre Dame, Indiana 1987)

Conclusions

(1) The integrity of human activity, believing, hoping, loving, thinking, acting is found in the heart.

(2) The heart is another word for symbol and is all-inclusive in its meaning as principle of unity in anthropology. Thus, where we Westerners speak of "mind" Russians speak of "heart." In the famous eighteenth-century Greek anthology of spiritual texts, the *Philocalia*, the ideal is that the mind descend into the heart, i.e. the integration of the various aspects of human beings.

(3) The integration of hearing and seeing cannot happen without reference to action. But the decision takes place in the heart.³³

The place of the icon in Christian life and thought

The place of the icon in both Christian life and thought is determined by its quasi-sacramental character: its intrinsic tie-up with the possibility of rendering present the saints portrayed and creating communion between them and Christians as well as the intrinsic connection to real symbol in theology, a strategic concept in all of its treatises.

After having treated at some length several aspects of the theology of the icon we may now try to grasp its essence through a comparison. We have already seen that monks are called in Eastern theology "living icons," because by their lifestyle these ought to give us some idea of the world to come. Furthermore, we may compare icons with that category of saints in the Eastern Church known as "fools for Christ's sake," *jurodivje*.³⁴ Their apparent eccentricity was only a world superficially upside down, but in reality it drew attention to a message, in itself unforgettable but easily ignored, about the world transfigured by grace.

So by their very nature, almost by their very absurdity, icons transmit an appeal. The rediscovery of the icon in our times gives us the occasion to respond positively. In a world where East and West have a chance to draw closer, the fascination with the icon represents the opportunity to reflect about our common past, in part unfortunate and sinful. This means that we ought to interpret our past history not only by the historical stages which eventually led to division and separation, but also by the strands of communal feeling and thinking which

33. For the integration of word and action in the Decalogue see A. Deissler, *Ich bin dein Gott, der dich befreit hat*, (Herder, Freiburg i.Br. 1975) 73-79 and 131-136.

34. Børtnes, *Ibid.*, 224.

remained all throughout, when also in various degrees. Such a reflection would help us recreate global community.

At the same time, the presence of icons in so many new areas of life spells out a warning. Icons are intimately linked with beauty. Now, by introducing beauty as a category in Christian living and thought we are in danger of promoting vanity and complacency as well as of creating an aesthetic theology. But, as Hans Urs von Balthasar (d. 1988) has pointed out, what we need is rather a capacity to perceive God's beauty in a contemplation prone to Christian action. We need a theological aesthetic, not an aesthetical theology.³⁵

The status of beauty

But, if it is so important to point to beauty in the very data of revelation (and not reduce theology to an idle game for the pretentious), it is equally important to determine the role which beauty should play in Christian thinking. In scholastic philosophy there is the dispute whether the pulchrum (= beauty) is only an integration or harmonious interplay between the verum (= truth) and the bonum (= good), or whether it is an independent transcendental i.e. whatever can be predicated of a being insofar as it is a being.³⁶ But usually we notice how vital beauty is through the havoc it wreaks when it is lacking. If without beauty a truth is less true and a good is less good; if without beauty dogma runs the risk of becoming rationalist and ethics that of becoming voluntaristic,³⁷ this is due to the fact that the integrity of thought in life and maturity generally is not possible without beauty. Here again, we come across the communitarian theology of the Fathers from another angle.

From what we have just said it follows that iconography must remain at the service of the community. Perhaps modern Western art started deviating somewhat from communitarian standards when the individual artist became more and more at the centre of attention, whereas, in iconography an anonymous service is rendered so that God's honour and the community's service may be one and the same thing.³⁸

35. Moda, *Ibid*, 54-55.

36. O. Muck, *Christliche Philosophie*, (Butzon & Bercker, Kvelaer Rheinland 1964) 65-85.

37. Cfr Babolin, *Icona e Conoscenza*; also: E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, (Phaidon Press; London 1969); and J. Børtnes, *Visions of Glory. Studies in Early Russian Hagiography*, (Solum Forlag A/S; Oslo 1988) Humanities Press Int., INC, N. Jersey.

38. For the Marble Pulpit of the Baptistry in Pisa (1259-1260) Nicola Pisano was commemorated by

Now, since iconography is at the service of community, and the community is a concrete community, it is more than understandable that icons not only represent tradition in its continuity, but also continue tradition on their own, i.e. represent tradition in its discontinuity. Icons reflect not only the mainstream tradition, but also traditions of particular groups of Christians. Indeed, since there does not exist a mainstream tradition in the abstract, but the tradition of the Great Church always existed only in local Churches, there emerges an interesting pattern for the understanding of tradition. We have thus far tried to define tradition as the global vision of Christianity. Precisely this vision, however, is not seldom invisible — usually in part, and sometimes even as a whole. It is the mission of the icon, and of Christian art generally, to make visible what we are tempted to overlook. In the relationship between mainstream tradition and local traditions we have the possibility of understanding besides what the dynamics of tradition consist in. A whole picture cannot be present to the same degree and in every detail to the beholder. This holds especially true of that huge tapestry which is the Christian faith.³⁹ Tradition is as much visible as it is invisible.

It is in this context that we can hear afresh the famous saying of Dostoevsky, "Beauty will save the world." The beauty which is here meant is as much visible, because it is hard to deny the great fascination icons can exercise, on believer and unbeliever alike. But visible beauty is only a signpost for invisible beauty, that spiritual beauty which can only be attained through the trimming of our ego which is called asceticism or purification. There is aesthetics to asceticism, for there is a sense of proportion making of asceticism not a matter of human feat but of divine grace.⁴⁰

The beauty of the icon is derived not only from the aesthetic methods employed but also — and primarily — from the integration of these with the truth.⁴¹ When

this inscription: "Anno millenno bis centum bisque triceno hoc opus insigne sculpsit Nicola Pisanus laudetur digne tam bene docta manus." (In the year 1260 Nicola Pisanus engraved this splendid work. May his hand receive the honours which are due to such a capacity.); in: F. Baumgart, *Ibid*, 154. Of course, there are regions and times when Eastern iconographers, emulating the new trends now common in the West, signed their icons. See Fischer, *Ibid*, 173.

39. See V. Lossky, "Tradition and Traditions," in L. Ouspensky and V. Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, (St Vladimir's Theological Seminary; New York 1982) 722. Also: Y. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, (Burns & Oates; London 1966).
40. An eloquent example of beauty as measure of discipline is the life of St Dositheus, the disciple of St Dorotheus (d. c. 560/580) the superior of a monastery in Gaza. When upon his disciple's death Dorotheus praised him as a saint the monks protested, because Dositheus was not particularly renowned for his penances and even nipped at the food destined for the sick and at leftovers. They ignored that Dositheus had instead humility and mortification of the will.
41. However, one should not be obtuse to the beauty of which icons are thoroughly capable. Here one

beauty itself is iconic it transmits a message about the beauty of the world to come. The icon's drastic efforts not to conform to the ways of the world (Rom 12,12) are meant to safeguard the hard core of theology: the primacy of the spiritual in Christian life and of insight in Christian thought, and not reduce Christianity to pharisaism or a rigid system of Spiritless thought.⁴²

Conclusions

(1) The role of the icon is to radiate a message of transfiguration on all levels: that of love, culture and thought. In this sense the icon is the guarantee of an anthropology of symbol, capable of protecting human activities from being vitiated through illusions. In life, its highest achievement is its offer of transfigured love; in thought, its lasting contribution is the elaboration of a theology of symbol capable of expressing succinctly the main contents of classical theology.

(2) The retrieval of the theology of the symbol must be a priority in modern-day theology. It can function as a principle of harmony in the reconstruction necessary in modern thought generally.

(3) The retrieval of the theology of the symbol has manifold implications for practically all areas of theology and general culture. It requires a critique of the icon and the symbol in the religious, psychological, theological and philosophical spheres. It can function as a principle of interpretation of history, a guide to the reform of theological studies and a plan to develop afresh a communitarian theology. In Europe, this can mean a European theology, East and West.

(4) In theology a greater unity has to be sought in order to give it back its balance. Theology and spirituality must be forged into a unity of vision, so that

need only point out to the great variety of different types of icons. Nonetheless, even here, the many types can often be reduced to a simple intuition. Suffice it to say that the main types of icons of Our Saviour may be reduced to three: a. the Vernicle or true face; b. the Pantocrator; and c. the Emmanuel or the Child enclosed in a mandorla borne on the breast of the Theotokos in the gesture of praying. The types of icons dedicated to the Theotokos may be reduced to four: a. the Hodegitria or the Theotokos of the Way; b. the Theotokos of Tenderness; c. the Theotokos Enthroned; and d. the Theotokos praying (Orante), called Theotokos of the Sign when she bears the Emmanuel in a mandorla on her breast. Cfr Fischer, *Ibid*, 173-187; also G. Gharib, *Le icone mariane: storia e culto*, 85-98, who reduces the Marian icons to seven basic types: the Brephocratousa, the Hodegitria, the Eleousa, the Hagiosoritissa, the Blachernitissa, the Basilissa and the Galactotrophousa. According to him, it was precisely the iconoclastic crisis which induced the Church to warn artists against letting their fantasy roam freely, but to adopt instead easily recognizable models capable of countless variations.

42. Cfr P.C. Phan, *Culture and Eschatology: The Iconographical Vision of Paul Evdokimov*, (P. Lang; New York 1992). See also I Hausherr, "Pour comprendre l'Orient chrétien: La primauté du spirituel." *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* (1967) 351-369.

dogma becomes articulate spirituality and spirituality lived dogma. Incidentally, a unitive theology would include theology as a whole, and not only dogma and spirituality. But dogma and spirituality are here taken as the best example of the union that is meant. This unitive vision, inclusive of all the major aspects of theology, must itself live from worship and dogmatic formulae must find an echo in doxology.

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