

---

## THE MEANING AND THE CONTENT OF THE SACRED IMAGE FROM A PEDAGOGICAL VIEW

**Carmen-Maria Bolocan**\*

*University 'Al. I. Cuza', Faculty of Orthodox Theology, 9 Closca, 700065 Iasi,  
Romania*

(Received 16 May 2008, revised 22 July 2008)

---

### **Abstract**

Our study wants to underline the meaning and the content of the saint icon in the life of Church, and implicitly, in the life of man, of the Christian. We also intend to show the meaning of the saint icon for that people that love the spiritual life and the approaching to God.

*Keywords:* icon, functions, education, representation, Liturgy

---

### **1. The embodiment of Logos - proof of the Holy Trinity love and base for worshipping the saint icon**

The present study is meant to be a continuation, from another point of view of the previous study entitled: *The Icon a Theological and Catechetical Approach* [1].

In the Old Testament the religious pictures were totally forbidden: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image- any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them nor serve them" (Exodus 20.4-5, Deuteronomy 5.8-9) [2].

This interdiction was motivated because God had revealed Himself to people just through words and sounds before [3]. His face was totally unknown to people: "And God talked to you on the mountains from the middle of fire, and the sound of His voice you heard but His face you didn't see, but only the voice you heard." (Deuteronomy 4.12) That's why any trial of representing a image of God would have endangered "the purity of cult for the unknown God" [4]. However, Isaiah, the prophet says: "I saw Him and He had nor face, neither beauty. His appearance was praise less and He was abandoned by all people". (Isaiah 53.3) "How could these two ideas be put together - Teodor Studitul, The Saint, wonders - in case they are not opposite. It is obvious that both texts tell us about the same person - the former denying that in God could be any kind of likeness, that divinity is unseen, so, there is no possible likeness, the later,

---

\* e-mail: maria\_carmenb@yahoo.com

claiming that, the same Lord taking the embodiment of a slave could be seen just like us, the people. For that reason He is circumcised in His human body, even if He isn't circumcised like God" [5]. This is the reason for which in the Old Testament the representation of God was forbidden. The image of God can't be made because the divinity is without shape, is unseen, without body, not circumcised. "It is simply craziness and lack of faith - Joan Damaschinul says - to try to make an image of the divinity." [6] This is because God hadn't completely revealed Himself in the Old Testament, and the Divine Word hadn't embodied. "But when, because of His mercy, God embodied Himself as a man..., His appearance could be represented in the icon in order for us to remember Him, to acquire new knowledge, and we that didn't witness Him when was here, and didn't really see, now hearing and believing we can be blessed with the happiness of God." [6]

If the drawing of God image was the denied, the sculptural representation of the angels was accepted even ordered by God. (Exodus 25.1, 17-22; Numbers 24.8-9) However, the interdiction from the Old Law (Exodus 20.4; Deuteronomy 5.8), concerning the appraisal of idols, the icon not being an idol, had a temporary character and it must be taken just as "the purification of an awaiting, a prophecy about the coming of Christ's icon" [4, p. 168]. This interdiction had to be marked as a law, said St. Teodor Studitul [5, p. 78], for the 'precipice of polytheism' to be avoided, an ineluctable problem of Israelite people on different moments of its life, but a reversible one, due to the spiritual leaders of Israel.

If inside the Old Testament, God can't be seen, but heard, in the New Testament "God showed Himself in a body, He embodied through the Holy Spirit, He was seen by angels, He was told about among people, He ascended to Glory" (I Timothy 3.16). From now on, God doesn't reveal Himself only by word, but by the presence of the Person of His Son "And the Word embodied, and He came among us, and we saw His Glory..." (John 1.14). The One who created the man in 'His image' (Genesis 1.26), takes the image of man, as if "He would be compelled to take a shape, and the most appropriate shape is that of the humankind. The earthen mankind is the necessary extension of the celestial mankind of divinity." [7] God of the Christians is not a God without a visible image, but a God with image and this is the image of Jesus Christ [8]. And if He can be felt, touched, seen, He can be represented in an icon.

Although The Word of God embodies and tells about Himself that He is a real man (Mathew. 8.20, 9.6, 8.11) and a real God "The one who saw Me, he saw My Father" (John 14.9); "Me and My Father are the one" (John 10.30), however due to the polytheist atmosphere during the first centuries, the Christians were very reticent towards the religious images. Gradually, the Greek-Romano polytheism decays and the cult of the icons strengthens, spreading more and more, without being imposed by an imperial decree, but "naturally blossoming from the Christian soul, covered by the power of the Grace" [9].

It is true that “nobody has ever seen God” (John 1.18), but as it is written in The Holy Scriptures: “The Son, The One-Born, who is in God’s bosom, That One showed Him”. It was The Son through His Embodiment, that made God-The Father, Known. In the answer given by Our Saviour at Philip’s request “Lord, show us The Father and it is enough for us”, He underlines: “It’s been so long since I’m with you, and you haven’t known me, Philip? That who saw me, he saw The Father” (John 14.9). Therefore, the embodiment of Lord, gave us the right to paint Him in the icons, and this doesn’t mean that we separate His body from His divinity, for the Orthodox icon doesn’t represent especially His manly beauty, but it aims the one who look at it to be taught the truth of the Orthodox faith, meaning that Jesus Christ is a true man and a true God. If we hadn’t represented Jesus Christ in the icons, this would have meant that we deny His human nature, His life on Earth, and His Crucifixion [10].

After the Embodiment of our Lord, when God’s revelation was fully realized, the Christian Church continued and amplified the veneration of the saint icons in a new, superior context. It was not the ornament aspect that was seen in the icon, but the spiritual role, the word of the Holy Bible. St. Basil the Great, says about this: “What the word transmits to hearing, that is what the painting tells in an image silently.” Being in permanent touch with the cult of the Church and the faith of the believers, the saint icons continued the life and the tradition of the Church, maintaining its knowledge according to the characteristics of each epoch. During the first Christian centuries, at the time of persecutions, the iconography had a symbolic and allegoric character. The paintings from the catacombs use symbols like: fish, anchor, lamb etc. Even if in a very naïve form the biblical representations were also present, and they strengthened the believers and made them more convinced about the almightiness of God [10].

## **2. The Edict from Milan, expression of the liberty for the cult of the icon**

After the Edict from Milan, when the Church gained the liberty of manifestation, the symbolical representations proved to be insufficient in order to express the Christian learning. During the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, various scenes from the Old and the New Testament, as well as from the life of the Church expressed different events from the divine iconomy, the meaning of some red-letter days, consecrated to some important moments from the history of our redemption. When the first heretical learnings wanted to equalize the Christendom with idolatry, the saint icons remembered the Christians the true learning of the Church. This way the Greek alpha and omega letters, which in the period of persecutions symbolized the eternity and the divine nature of our Lord, now in the icon they show the same being of Christ with His Father, a definite argument against Arie, the heretic, who considered the Son, a creature of the Father.

During 726-843 A.D., because of the iconoclasm, many worshipers of the saint icons endured persecutions. Despite of this, they protected them as a fruit of their true faith, which the icons express and announce. From that time on, the saint icons were constantly preserved in our Church. The victory of the reestablishing the veneration of the saint icons together with the other dogmas of our Saint Church are celebrated, every year, by all Orthodox churches, on The Sunday of Orthodoxy, which is the first Sunday from the Lent of Easter.

There is no reason to thing of idolatry when looking at the saint icons. It is true that many icons are brilliantly realized, they being locked up in silver or gold, but the believer has never confounded God with the metal the icons are made of.

Regarding the icons worshipping, The 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Synod decided: "Following the divine learning of our Saint Fathers and of the Universal Church Tradition, we decide, the image of the Worshiped and Life-giving Cross, to be settled in the holy churches of God, on saint vases and garments, on walls and ceilings, in the houses and near the roads; the worshiped and saint icons also, painted in various colours of gems and other suitable material, shall be made like the icon of our Lord and God, our Saviour Jesus Christ, and our Mistress and Mother of our God, as well those of the saint angels, all the saints and other pious men. For anytime when we see them through the image represented in the icon, every time the onlookers will be urged to remember and love the ones represented there, and to worship them by kissing the icon and making respectful bow in front of it, not the true divine bow(latria) which is appropriate only for the unique divine being, but with the same worship proper to the image of the holy cross and with incense burning and candles lights as in the pious old tradition. For the worship which is given to the image, reaches the prototype, and the one who bows in front of the icon, bows in front of that who is represented on it. This way the learning of our Saint Fathers strengthens; this is the Tradition of the Universal Church, which received the Holy Scriptures all over the world". [10]

The unwritten tradition, confirmed and strengthened by The 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Synod, mentioned the veneration of the icon of our Lord Jesus Christ, of our Holy Theotokos, of the saints, of the angels - as it is told by the same theologian of the icons. "We venerate His icon, Christ's icon. We venerate - John the Damaschin, said - everything that belongs to Him, His servants, His friends, and above all, His Mother, Theotokos [6]. It is important to mention that the Orthodox Church brings to our Holy Virgin - the new Eva lively icon, who gave birth to the True Light - a greater veneration compared to that brought to the saints, it is a super-veneration. In the icons of the saints, the 'pneumatic' life of Christ is present, so, the shine on their faces show the purity and the presence of the Holy Spirit of Christ. We worship our Lord, Jesus Christ, we super-venerate His Holy Mother and we venerate the saints, through the saint icons they are represented in. The icons are true 'pneumatised' evidences of Christ. This presence of the Holy Spirit in the human face painted on the icon also suggests the most concentrated manifestation of the human spirituality towards

nature, for God Himself took the human face for eternity. The origin of the icons and the justification of their presence inside the Church, it is made true by the recognition of the faith in Jesus Christ - The One Who embodied and Crucified for us, on Golgotha. Through this embodiment, the man became the icon of God, because He “talked to us through His Son”(Jewish 1.1-2) Thus, we can assert that the first ‘maker’ of an icon was God Himself, at the moment when He gave birth to His son.

In the icons of the saints, the Saint Fathers saw a dwelling of Jesus Christ or of The Holy Spirit, the power of the uncreated, divine work, ‘a registering of their sublime deeds’, a mean of unifying with God, by contemplation.

### **3. The liturgical texts - possible illustrated sacred images**

The Tradition of the Church affirms that the first icon of Jesus Christ was made even from the time of His earthen life.

The history of the provenience of Christ’s this first image is registered in the texts of the Liturgy that is dedicated to this event, on August the 16<sup>th</sup>. Thus, “painting Your all immaculate image, You sent it to Abgar, the believer, the one who wanted to see You, You that are unseen by the cherubims” (the verse of the 8<sup>th</sup> voice, from the vespers). A verse from the morning service (the 4<sup>th</sup> voice) says: “You sent Abgar the epistles written by your holy hand, the man who asked from you the redemption and the health which sprang from the appearance of Your divine image.” Generally and more often in the churches having the name of The Saint Mahrama, the allusions at Abgar’s story are frequent, especially in the liturgical service of the holiday.

In the liturgical service, the holiday of The Holy Image, is named, “The transfer from Edessa to Constantine’s fortress, of the image unmade by the man’s hand, belonging to our Lord, Jesus Christ, the image named The Holy Image.” The Liturgy of that special day doesn’t limit to a simple commemoration of the icon’s transfer from one place to another. The essence of the service is the dogmatic base of the image and its destination.

The meaning of the expression “unmade by a man’s hand” reminds the text from Marcus 14.58: “We heard Him saying: I’ll crash down this temple made by man’s hand, and during three days, another one unmade by man I’ll build.” Before everything this image is the Embodied Word Himself, who shows Himself “in the temple of His body” (John 2.21) From now on, the Law of Moses which forbidden the images (Exodus 30.4) is no longer respected, and the icons of Christ become strong undefeatable of the Embodiment of God. It is not about created by a common human conception, it represents the authentic image of The Son of God born as man, and according to the tradition of the Church, it comes from the immediate contact with His face. We have noticed that the verses cited above, as well as other liturgical texts underlines the historical provenience of the image. We talk, thus about a historical Person, who lived in a certain place and in a certain period of time: “Settling in the first glory the image of the fallen Adam - we can hear in one of the verses of the holiday (the second

verse, the 1<sup>st</sup> voice from the small Vesper) - The Lord not understood by His nature, lived on Earth, seen and touched by people”

The biblical texts from the Liturgy are also very important for our study. Most of these texts unveil the meaning of the celebrated event, firstly underlining its biblical foreshadowing, then they praise their realization in The New Testament and reveal their eschatological significance. On the other hand the selection of these texts show us what we already know from St. John the Damaschin's works, namely the way the Church understands the interdiction from The Old Testament, the sense and the scope of this interdiction, together with the sense and the scope of the image in The New Testament. In this respect we find the three paroemias from vesper: two are extracted from Deuteronomy (the first : chapter 4.6-7 and 9-15; the second: chapter 5.1-7, 9-10, 23-26, 28; chapter 6.1-5, 13 and 18; and the last from The Third Book of Kings (The First Book of Kings from the Hebrew Bible) chapter 7.22-23 and 27, 30-33).

The two first paroemias tell about the revelation of the Law, to the Israelite people, on the Horeb Mountain, just before the entrance of the chosen people in The Land of Promise. The meaning of these two paroemias is that, in order to enter this Land of Promise and to master it, it is absolutely necessary to respect the revealed law and to worship the only true God, with a religiosity without compromises, without the possibility of combining it with the cult for other gods. It is also reminded the fact that it is impossible to represent God Who stands unseen.

The third paroemia is another foreshadowing of the new-testamentary learning: it is Solomon's prayer at the consecration of the Temple built by himself: “Would God live among people on Earth? - says Solomon. As long as the sky and the sky of the skies can't comprise You, it is no chance for this Temple I made in the name of You, to include You...” This tells about the future coming of God on Earth, about His participation in the course of the human history, about the presence of God - the One That ‘the sky couldn't comprise’ - in a human Temple.

The significance of these paroemias is specified in the Epistle read during this Liturgy. It is about St. Paul's Epistle to Colossians, chapter 1.12-18: “Gladly thanking to our Father, The One Who made us able to take part in the inheritance of the saints, into light. He took us out from the power of the darkness and moved us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in which we have the redemption through His blood, meaning the forgiveness of our sins. This is the face of our God, the unseen one, and born before the creation of everything”. It is obvious that this text reveals the fulfilment of the prophecy: ‘The Inheritance of The Saints’, ‘the kingdom of the Son of His love’ it is in fact the Church, foreshadowed by the old Land of Promise. So, all the demonstration of the Old Testament which protects the purity of the chosen people and the entire history of the people of Israel appears like a providential messianic process, like a preparation for the presence of the Body of Christ on Earth - The Church of The New Testament. And in this preparatory process, the denying of the images leads to the appearance of The One Who has been invisible, of ‘the

image of the unseen God' unveiled in the God-Man, Jesus Christ. In the Liturgy of the holiday we can hear: "Before the proper time, Moses asking, saw the divine glory in the darkness, by guessing, but now, The New Israel can clearly see you, face to face." (the second hymn from the 4 part of the canon).

Let's have a look now at the evangelic text read at the Liturgy of the day. It is the same Gospel both at the morning service and at the Liturgy: "And when the days of His Ascension came, He decided to go to Jerusalem, and he sent messengers to announce His arrival. And on their way they got to a Samaritan village and they tried to make preparations for His arrival. But the Samaritan people didn't receive Him because He wanted to go to Jerusalem. At this attitude, Jacob and John, the disciples, reacted and asked Him: Lord, do you want us to order for the fire to come down from the skies and burn them out, exactly as Ilie did? But He turning towards them, reprovved and asked them: Don't you know whose spirit are you the sons of? For the Son of Man doesn't come to lose the people's souls but to save them. And they went to another village..." (Luke 9.51-56). Also in the chapter 10.22-24: "All the things were given to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is besides the Father, and who the Father is, besides the Son and the ones whom God wants to reveal to. And turning to His disciples, He said: "Blessed are the eyes which can see what you see! For I tell you: Many prophets and kings wanted to see what you can see, but they couldn't, and they wanted to hear what you can hear, but they didn't hear."

As we can notice the meanings which, on the one hand, the Epistle and the Gospel and on the other hand the paroemia give to the images, are opposed. Firstly: "You didn't see the image of God" and then "Blessed are the eyes which can see what you see!", namely 'the image of unseen God', meaning Jesus Christ. That's way the last words of this evangelic text are addressed only to the Apostles. It is true that not only the disciples but all the people around Him could see Jesus, the man. It was only the Apostles that in this Son of Man - who took 'the image of a slave'- saw the Son of God, 'brightness from the glory of the Father'.

The first excerpt of the Gospel (Luke 9.55-56) underline what separates the Apostles from the world, meaning what makes Church different from the world, its spirit and its methods, which don't belong to the world. If the paroemia shows the scope for which the images are forbidden, the Gospel, on the contrary, unveils even the sense of the image. It is also important to notice the fact that, the difference between the Apostles' spirit and methods, on the one hand, and the worldly ones, on the other hand, is proved by Christ before His entrance to Jerusalem. If we start with the parimies and then we pass to the New Testament texts, we observe a kind of progress of the revelation, The Old Testament is a preparation for The New Testament, the Land of Promise the people of Israel aims to, is an image of the New Testament Church.

#### **4. The content of the sacred image**

In Orthodoxy, the beauty of an icon cannot survive without the doctrinaire spirit which made it lively. In Orthodoxy we can speak, firstly, about a theology of the icons, about a theology that necessitates iconology, and then about an art of the religious iconology, whose aim is but not for itself, the content itself is determined by the necessities and by the canon of the Church.

In the primary Church the icon was concretized especially in the form of some symbols: the grape-vine, the anchor, the dove, the fish, the ark, the good shepherd, the tree of life, and especially the Saint Cross, which announced the dogma of the Embodiment and of the redemption of the humankind. Through the medium of these symbols, the Christians remembered the prototypes they were meant for, as we can find in the dogmatic tradition of the Orthodox Church. "For we are tied up by our senses - the Saint Fathers at the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Synod - we can't get to the intelligible things, but through the medium of the sensible symbols, or through The Holy Scriptures, or the iconographic representation. It is this way to remind us the prototypes, and to lead us to them: we can perceive some of them by hearing, others by contemplating with our eyes, and each of them explain the other, with no contradiction, they make clear each other and they receive the same consideration." [11]

The origin of the icons must be looked for not only in these symbols, but also in the paintings of the first Christian centuries, especially in those found in Egypt. The portraits painted in wax, a technique specific to the epoch mentioned above, represent a base for the icons which, beginning with the 6<sup>th</sup> century, gain a very important place in the Byzantine iconography. The icons made in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and preserved inside the St. Catherine Monastery on the Sinai Mountain, are an undisputed proof of the type of the iconographic painting used in the primary Church.

The Christian symbols, and mainly the saint icons, have always constituted representations in images of the Orthodox catechism. As a retort at the false interpretations of its learning by the heretics, the Orthodox Church formulated the Creed and the dogmas, creating a speculative theology. This was exposed and interpreted ex-cathedra by the hierarchy. But the common believer, no matter what nation he belonged to, needed more simple explanations and interpretations. In order to answer the needs of these believers, the Orthodox Church found a real support in the mural and iconographic painting, which remained across the centuries, an open Bible, for every one, and also 'windows to eternity'. The content of the icons was closely connected to the life, the evolution, and the entire tradition of the Church, and to the artistic and ethnical characteristics of the believers in a certain region.

The conception and the tradition of the icons derives from the Saint Fathers and not from the painters, the domain of the painter is limited to his art, the content and the arrangement of the saint icons is described by the Saint Fathers.

The transposition of the faith learning into images creates in the oriental Orthodox iconography, a range of important dogmatic ideas. The intention and the ideal of the Orthodox iconography is to express the sanctity aspect, what is different of the ideal specific to the antique classical art, which wanted to expose the values of 'good' and 'beauty'. The Christian art doesn't address only to the artistic refinement, but especially to the soul.

The Orthodox icons constantly reproduce the deifying of the mankind. For an Orthodox Christian, the icons are visible appearances of the supernatural representations. If for an occidental Catholic the oil painting is more appropriate to reproduce the sensorial world, and for an occidental Protestant the engraving is more plausible for his syllogistic - rational scheme, for an Orthodox the icon makes possible for the metaphysical essence to become alive in what it represents, so we can become the sons of the Taboric light.

So, the Christians don't venerate the being, the substance or the nature of the icon, they venerate the image of the prototype imprinted like a seal on it. What distinguishes the archetype from the image, is the nature of it, therefore, the icon is inferior to the prototype considering the glory. It is true that in an icon we see only 'the image of Christ' and not Jesus Christ Himself in His Person as the Apostles saw and Thomas recognized: "We saw the Lord" (John 20.25). This could be the only deficiency of the icon, and not the fact that by his nature it belongs to the material world, because Christ belongs to the world too, by His body. That's way the icon mustn't be contemplated just in an intellectual way, but in a spiritual one, for, if this way of looking at an icon had been sufficient, Jesus Christ would have come in a different way to us [12]. Or Jesus Christ had a human body, He stood among people, He made wonders, He endured torments, He was crucified, He resurrected and then ascended to the skies. Denying the icon, the icon - opponents show their despise towards body - which Christ assumed in order to transfigure it - and suppress people's trust in getting the likeness with God and, at the same time, they closed God inside His Transcending [7, p. 52].

The icon is a transmitting mode of God's revelation, of showing the faith and of participating to the divine Truth. "The representation of the divine was made possible by the symbol quality (and not a simple conventional sign) of the religious image considered to effectively participate in the showed reality: the sacred image is, and at the same time, is not entirely, the imagined divine reality." [9, p. 5] It is not the Truth in itself, but expresses in image the truths of the Christian religion, and it always refers to another world different from the immanent one, incorporating in itself the personal, relational presence of the Model it represents [12, p.176]. It is an 'Image of the eternity' (Lucian Blaga asserts that: "The icons are a reflex of the eternity, bearers of one transcending" [13-15]), a preparation and an anticipation of eschatological perception of Christ [5, p. 42]. Looking at it, it permits us to "transcend the time and to perceive the eternity in the trembling mirror of the faces" [13]. Being a part of the essence of the Christendom [16], it is a faithful connection between the believer and what

he believes [17], the sacred place of meeting God [18], showing him that, the object of his faith, of his cult, is not a fiction but a reality.

Together with the word, the icon is a mean of the revelation of the divinity and of communication with the divinity. The Creative Word of the Father always addresses to the hearing and to the sight: (I John 1.1-2), what means that the word and the images are complementary. If the word addresses to the hearing, but it also touches the heart, (The Deeds 2.37), the image addresses to the sight and to the rational-spiritual perception. Both the icon and the word concern the man as a whole: body and soul. Just like the word, the icon works upon the soul, although it addresses to the senses. But the work is not properly theirs but it belongs to God's spirit. Neither the image in itself, nor the word can do something without the power of the divine spirit. It is the divine spirit that works through the medium of the icon or the word. The mission of the icon - not much different from that of the word in a preach - it is not only to announce the Embodiment of the Word, but also to transmit the truths of our faith revealed by God, or to unveil the Mysteries from Above [19], but to make possible the Word of God to embody inside the souls of the believers.

## **5. The pedagogical view on worshipping the saint icons**

The human nature is not autarchic and it can be perfected only by participation, communion and grace. The Saints are, pre-eminently, accomplices of the divine grace, and that's way the one who venerate a saint, take part at the sanctity and the grace what is sheltered in that saint. The presence of The Holy Spirit lies 'in the saint icons of the Saints - not substantially - but through grace and work'. In The Orthodox Church the veneration of the saint icons, is based on "not only the nature of the subjects that are represented on them, but on the faith in this presence full of grace, which the Church invokes through the power of sanctifying the icon. The ritual of blessing an icon, establishes an undisputed connection between the image and the prototype on it, between the one who is painted and his/her real appearance." By the power of this graceful presence, every sanctified icon is, theoretically, wonder-making [11].

It is the cult that facilitates us the ontological link with the prototypes in the icons. As concerning the nature and the character of the cult of the icons, it is important to underline the fact that the Saint Fathers have never confounded it with the worship fitted to God. We praise God, by worshipping Him, and we praise the saints, their remains and their icons, by venerating them. Between the icon and the prototype on it there is a certain similitude but not nature identity. The quality of the similitude with the prototype justifies and legitimates the cult of the icons, and the difference of nature determines the essence of this cult.

For us, the Orthodox Christians, the icon can't be defined either as a piece of art belonging to one or another historical epoch or as a expression of the national features of one people or another. It is important for us, the role of the icon which is universal like the Orthodoxy itself, being determined by the essence of its image and by its role inside the Church. In Orthodoxy, the icon has

firstly a liturgical-sacramental role and secondly an artistic role. That's way in our Church there is no liturgical service without an icon.

Explaining each other (the word and the image), as is written in the text of the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Synod (787), and having the mission to strengthen the faith in the Embodiment of the Word of God, the icon teaches the ones that don't know to read, the true faith, it sanctifies the sight of the ones that look at it and it raises their mind to the knowledge of God.

The iconography of the Orthodox Church is not only an artistic art, it is a religious art. It presents events from the history of our Redemption made through our Lord, Jesus Christ. The entire painting atmosphere in the Church is dominated by the light of the Resurrection. The whole content of the paintings in the Orthodox Church show a new sky and a new land, namely, those specific to the redemption work of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It shows the man and the world regenerated through the divine grace. The inhabitants of this world are the angels and the saints. The Orthodox iconography is not focused on the painter's personality; it rather expresses the significance of the painted event from the divine revelation. In it the creed of our Holy Church is expressed. When we speak about the personality of a religious painter, we are interested in his power of expressing as profoundly and clearly possible the spiritual ideals of our Orthodox faith. Being a spiritual, liturgical and theological art, it implies profoundness, and it doesn't impress the ones who are concerned only with the surface of things.

The Church strives to be an accurate interpreter of the spiritual world. The transcendental content of the icons in our Church is not reduced at the natural beauty. That's why even a beginner in the problems of art could easily discern between an Orthodox icon and an antique painting. This is because the ideal of our Orthodox painting is to express the sanctity. Being a liturgical art, the saint icons contribute in understanding the Orthodox cult. They are an integrant part of the Orthodox cult. The iconography helps the believer to understand the services inside the Orthodox cult. By empirical means it helps the believer to understand the mystery of the divine wisdom. For cult which is alive in 'spirit and truth', the Orthodox Church uses the most appropriate means that helps the believers in their work for redemption. During the Holy Liturgy, the believer participating in it, looking at the icons around feels that 'now the angels are praising together with us'. If the Orthodox iconography was reduced at the natural aspect, it would not acquire this spiritual profoundness. Besides this reason, the saint icons present aspects from the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, His Holy Mother, the Saints. They are a model for those who want to follow the true faith. In addition, being focused on certain topics (The birth of our Lord, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection), they present the essence of the Orthodox cult. There are also a lot of topics for the cult of our Holy Mother. The hymn of the Acatist created 24 new icons in the Orthodox iconography. As regarding the saints, the icons they are painted on, are about their life and their martyrdom praised in the hymns of the divine cult. Their death in martyrdom is often presented as an icon in which Jesus Christ Himself is present there with them

and offers them the wreath of martyrdom. This aspect is closely connected with the hymns dedicated to them in the Orthodox cult.

The saint icons don't mirror only the life of the Church in its entire variety and profoundness; they also are a constituent part of it, just like the branches for a tree. The icon doesn't only get inspired from the cult of the Church, but they form together a homogenate whole, completing it, explicating it, spreading its action upon the souls of the believers. The saint icons are a testimony of God's descending towards man, and of the man's effort to ascend to God. That's why the icons must make perceivable through art, the presence of grace of The Holy Spirit. It is the same grace that comes together with the saints painted in the icons.

## References

- [1] C.-M. Bolocan, *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2(3) (2006) 17.
- [2] I.I. Ivan, *The Metropoly of Oltenia*, 5-6 (1999) 63.
- [3] L. Uspensky, *The Theology of the Icon in the Orthodox Church*, Anastasia, Bucuresti, 1994, 22.
- [4] P. Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon – a Theology of Beauty*, Romanian translation by G. Moga and P. Moga, Meridiane, București , 1992, 167.
- [5] St. Teodor Studitul, *Jesus Christ - Prototype Of His Icon*, Romanian translation by I.I. Ica jr., Deisis, The Saint Monastery of John the Baptizer, Alba Iulia, 1994, 138.
- [6] St. Ioan Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, Romanian translation by D. Fecioru, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Scripta, București, 1993, 17.
- [7] D. Staniloae, *Theological Studies*, 1-4 (1979) 41.
- [8] G. Ghelasio, *The Christic Logos*, The Isihasm Collection, Conphys, Rimnicu Vâlcea, 1996, 8.
- [9] I.I. Ica jr., *The Byzantine Iconology between the Imperial Politics and Monastic Sanctity*, in St. Teodor Studitul, *Jesus Christ - Prototype Of His Icon*, Deisis, The Saint Monastery of John the Baptizer, Alba Iulia, 1994, 11.
- [10] Vasile Târgovișteanul, *The Saint Icons in the Orthodox Faith and Devoutness. Pastoral Guide*, The archiepiscopate of Bucharest, Bucharest, 1981, 83.
- [11] N.V. Dură, *The Orthodoxy*, 1 (1982) 61.
- [12] C. Schonborn, *The Icon of Christ*, Romanian translation by V. Raduca, Anastasia, București, 1996, 180.
- [13] P. Florensky, *Contacts*, 7 (1974) 325.
- [14] L. Blaga, *The Mioritic Space, The Trilogy of Culture*, The Foundations, București, 1988, 186.
- [15] O. Drimba, *The Philosophy of Blaga*, Centenarian, Excelsior Publishing-House Multi Press, București, 1994, 71.
- [16] P. Ramseyer, *The Word and the Image. Liturgy, Architecture and Sacred Art*, Delachaux and Niestle, Neuchatel, 1963, 58.
- [17] M.G. Siliato, *The Mystery of the Saint Shroud from Turin*, translation from Italian by N. Luca, Saeculum I.V. și Vestala, București, 1998, 129.
- [18] Maica Alexandra, *The Saint Angels*, Romanian translation by Irineu Pop-Bistriteanu, Anastasia, București, 1992, 273.
- [19] N. Crainic, *The Nostalgia of the Paradise*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Cugetarea - Georgescu Delafrans, București, 1942, 195.