
THE MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TYPE AND PROTOTYPE IN SAINT JOHN DAMASCENE'S TEACHINGS ON THE VENERATION OF ICONS

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Abstract

The relationship between type and prototype in Saint John Damascene's teachings on icons renders the relationship between the image and the model. Besides the likeness and the relationship with the model, the image has also a revealing character. What we observe in the prototype we convey through type. The type and the prototype are one in a single form: the likeness. Saint John Damascene finds the substantiation of this statement in the teaching about the Holy Trinity. The likeness between the Father and the Son goes all the way up to being identical in nature, while being at the same time different. This is also the revealing nature of the icon, through which we can see the source.

Keywords: prototype, type, icon, image, likeness, revelation

1. Introduction

Adolf von Harnack, the well-known historian of dogmas, rendered with precision the way we should understand the icons as they appear in Saint John Damascene's teachings: "Images are the ideas of things; man is the likeness of God; the word is the image of thought; the recollection of the past and the representation of the future are images. Everything is an image and the image is everything." [1]

Reviewing in parallel the Western Theology and the Eastern Theology, a defender of icons, Hans Frhr. von Compenhausen reveals that the former one expressed a special interest in the auditory-historical representations and concepts. On the contrary, the Greek Theology, a defender of the worship of icons, had a particular preference for the optical-esthetical representations and concepts [2].

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The two theologians have a common point of view. It consists in the conclusion that the teaching of the Eastern Theology is due to the influence of the Greek spirit [3], with the distinction made by von Compenhausen that with regard to the teaching about the worship of icons, the genuine Greek heritage influenced it and this strengthened the Greek Fathers' thinking over Platon and Neoplatonists [2].

The observations made by von Compenhausen with reference to the Eastern Theology, defender of icons, are correct as far as its preference for the image in comparison with the word, as he himself asserts. "In reality, the word and the image are not on the same side; the image is undoubtedly preferred to the word. The image is more energetic and more mobile (*eindringlicher und ergreifender*); it summarizes everything more concisely and excludes any misunderstanding; it even signifies ἀπόψυα, where no delusion can appear. The image is essential for the Church. The visualization of the face is the first human sense and therefore it has to be sanctified first and foremost through looking at the icon of Christ (*Der Gesichtssinn ist der erste menschliche Sinn und muß darum vor allen anderen durch das Anschauen des Bildes Christi geheiligt werden*). That is why the word has not such a priority over the image, because words are just images, abstracts concepts of the observed things." [2, p. 46]

We also need to mention that what the Greek Fathers and their thinking developed over the classical thinking is not due exclusively to the genuine Greek heritage; also the statement that the dogmatic thinking is the result of the influence of the Greek spirit on it cannot be supported. In the former case, we would meet the sublimation of naturalism; in the latter, more than that, a generalisation of it.

The reality that raises the Eastern Fathers' thinking above the naturalistic way of understanding the existence of man and creation is the Christian revelation unveiled in depth in the Person of our Saviour Jesus Christ and experienced by the Fathers in its personal and communitarian dimension.

In the case of our theme, the preference H. Frhr. von Compenhausen speaks about with good reason connects not only with the reality of the optical-esthetical representations and concepts, but also primarily with the mutual relationship between type and prototype based on the revelation of the Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition. Even the opponents of the worship of the icons took into account this relationship but they failed to understand it in an authentic manner through appealing to its scriptural and patristic grounding.

First, we will carry out a short survey of these attitudes in order to better understand Saint John Damascene's position of defender of icons and his contribution to an Orthodox understanding of the relationship between type and prototype in his teachings on the veneration of icons.

2. Brief historical of iconoclastics attitudes

One can consider Clement of Alexandria the first opponent of the icons. In his work '*Protreptikos (Exhortation to the Greeks)*', he expresses himself against icons, using as starting point the quote in Exodus 20.4. To support this, he states "Καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ ἀπηγόρευται ὑμῖν ἀναφανδὸν, ἀπατηλὸν ὀρίζεσθαι τέχνην" [4]. He writes that we should understand even the Cherubs in a symbolic manner, because God forbade representations. In Book VII of '*Stromata (Miscellanies)*', he does not use the word 'holy' when referring to the works of art (Οὐκέτ' οὖν ἱερὰ καὶ Θεῖα τῆς τέχνης τὰ ἔργα) [5]. Some more quotes from 'Paedagogus (Instructor)' are not favourable to icons [6].

In the West, Tertullian manifests also little understanding towards the icons. In '*De Spectaculis (On the Spectacles)*', Tertullian denounces the representations of the idols, which men worship as Gods [7]. Also, he rejects artists and their art in '*De Idolatria (On Idolatry)*' [8]. It is hard to say whether Tertullian is a declared opponent of the Christian icons. In '*De Pudicitia*' [9] he writes about "pastor, quem in calice depingis", without denouncing this action; in ch. 7, col. 991; he mentions "picturae calicum", without rejecting them.

The Council of Elvira (303) imputes in its turn the acceptance of icons in churches. The Council decides to allow no icons in churches for fear that man would adore and venerate what is painted on the walls: "*Placuit picturas in Ecclesia esse non debere, ne quod colitur et adoratur in parietibus depingatur*" [10].

Since early centuries, the heretical sects brought their contribution towards this hostile attitude, manufacturing statues of Jesus Christ and Mother of God and worshipping them with an idolatrous veneration. Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lugdunum (Lyon) speaks in the first book of his work '*Adversus Haeresis (Against Heresies)*' about Gnostics. They had holy icons representing Christ, which were coming from Pontius Pilatus, as they stated, and which they adorned and exposed together with the representations of Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle [11].

Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis (313-403) writes in his work '*Adversus Haeresis (Panarion)*' about the icons of the Carpocrates, which were an imitation of the Gnostic icons [12]. At the end of the Patristic Age, Saint John Damascene describes in the work bearing the same name, '*Adversus Haeresis*', which he took over in most part from Epiphanius of Salamis, some different sects that adopted iconolatry. The Simonians or the adepts of Simon Magus venerated their founder and his wife under the image of Jupiter and Minerva [Saint John Damascene, *Adversus Haereses*, 21, P.G. 94, col. 689 B]. The Carpocrates venerated the icon of Christ and of Saint Apostle Paul together with the representations of Homer and Pythagoras [13]. The risk of falling into idolatry was thus high.

Even after Constantine the Great proclaimed religious toleration for the Christian Church in the Roman Empire there still were voices that contested the icons. The Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea was, in this way, an opponent

of the Christian icons. He named the painting of the icons of Holy Apostles Peter and Paul and even that of Christ Himself pagan custom [14].

For this reason Eusebius refused to accomplish the request of Constantine's the Great sister, Constantia, that of sending her an icon of Christ. Eusebius stated as reason for his refusal that no one can paint an icon of the Transfiguration of Christ and that Christ could not have been represented before His Transfiguration [15].

One can number Epiphanius of Salamis, a passionate defender of the true faith, among the opponents of the icons. Some considered him the main adversary of icons. The Iconoclasts bestowed much value on his opinions against the veneration of the icons. Critics believe that Epiphanius is the author of the Epistle addressed to John, Bishop of Jerusalem. In this epistle, the author tells that he entered in a church in Anablata (Palestine) in order to pray. There he saw a curtain painted with an icon of Christ or of another saint. Very irritated, he tore the curtain to pieces, because it represented a man in the church, against the authority of the Holy Scripture. "*Cum ergo vidissem et detestatus essem in Ecclesia Christi contra auctoritatem Scripturarum hominis pendere imaginem, scidi illud, et magis dedi consilium custodibus eiusdem loci, ut pauperem mortuum eo obvolvorent et efferent.*" [16]

Saint John Damascene points out that it is unfair to attribute this writing to Epiphanius and argues that Epiphanius has never been driven away from the community of the Church Fathers, who were inspired by the same Holy Spirit (Οὐ γὰρ τοις συμπατράσιν ὁ Πατήρ μάχεται. Ενὸς γὰρ αἰοῦ Πνεύματος μέτοχοι πάντες γεγόνασι) [17].

Isolated sects and heresies were more prominent adversaries in the fight against icons. The Monophysites were, with no exception, opponents of the icons. Among them stood Philoxenus (+523) [18], Severus, Patriarch of Antioch, Peter Fullo, Patriarch of Alexandria. The Acephalites were also iconoclasts. Saint John Damascene gives after his third exhortation a sum of quotations from the 'Ecclesiastical History' of Theodorus and Epiphanius. All these quotes prove that the heretics were iconoclasts. For example, Paladius of Antioch consented to the removal of the icons of Holy Fathers [19].

The followers of Dioscorus, who favoured the Eutichian heresy, burned the icons of the Saints. Macedonius, Bishop of Constantinople, refused to celebrate the Holy Liturgy until all the icons were removed from there [19, col. 220 B].

In his work '*Against Heresies*', Saint John Damascene enumerates several sects who rejected icons: 'the categories of Christians' blamed the true Christians for the idolatric veneration they paid (rendered) to the icons of Jesus Christ, of the Mother of God or of the Angels. The iconoclasts rejected icons, broke them, burned them or removed those painted from the walls (frescos or mosaics) [13, col. 773 B]. The Aposhites honoured not only the Holy Cross, but also any icon [13, col. 777 A].

In the West, Serenus, Bishop of Marseille, took action against icons, ordering their removal from the churches and their destruction, because people revered them. Pope Gregory I the Great (590-604) urged him to reconsider [20].

Saint Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, provides clear explanations about the situation before the outburst of the rage against icons. From Saint Germanus's Epistle addressed to Thomas, Bishop of Claudeopolis, one can infer that Thomas's measure against icons caused much distress [21]. Saint Germanus underlines that entire cities and people suffered from this confusion (Νυν δὲ πόλεις ὅλας καὶ τὰ πλήθη των λαων οὐκ ἐν ὀλίγῳ περὶ τούτου Θορούβῳ τυγχάνουσιν) [21, col. 184D].

Another work of Saint Germanus, *'De Haeresis et Synodis (About Heresies and Councils)'* informs us that, besides Thomas, Bishop of Claudiopolis, there were some other clergymen that took measures against icons (Ὅπαδοί τε καὶ συναιρέται καὶ σύνδρομοι καὶ ἕτεροι του ἱερατικου καταλόγου γεγόνασιν) [22].

Saint Germanus taught Constantine, bishop of Nacolia, and gave him an epistle addressed to metropolitan John of Synada. Constantine mimicked obedience, but in fact he didn't deliver the letter and remained further on an iconoclast [23, 24].

3. The teaching of Saint John Damascene against iconoclasts

Confronted with such opinions, Saint John Damascene took a definite position on the matter by defining the image in the first and the third treatise against those decrying the Holy Images. In the first treatise, he says "An image is a likeness of the original with a certain difference, for it is not an exact reproduction of the original" [25]. In the third treatise, he defines more accurately the notion of image: "An image is a likeness and representation of someone, containing in itself the person who is imaged" (Εἰκῶν μὲν οὖν ἔστιν ὁμοίωμα, καὶ παράδειγμα, καὶ ἐκτύπωμά τινος, ἐν ἑαυτῷ δεικνύον τὸ εἰκονιζόμενον) [26].

In both places, Saint John Damascene underlines the distinction between image and model. The elements of the definition become clearer if the image represented by the icon is understood from the perspective of the scope of the icon "Every image is a revelation and representation of something hidden". The way the images are thought of is that they should bring to surface the hidden realities and thus make them accessible to people (δημοσίευσεν).

Thus, we can identify in the represented image three elements:

1. The likeness (ὁμοίωμα) of the image with its model and the distinction between them;
2. The relationship with the original (ἐκτύπωμα);
3. The revealing and indicatory character (ἐκφαντορική, δεικτική).

Regarding the first element, Saint John points out that before all, the image should be a likeness of the model, an imitation of the prototype. In order to observe the likeness of the image to the model, it is necessary that not only the image, but also the model to be visible in its exterior appearance or in its visible form. What one can observe at the prototype it can be rendered through type. The likeness of the image to the model consists thus in the representation, and only the visible one, of the exterior figure or form which is imitated. For instance, the image of a man may give his bodily form, but not his mental powers. It has no life, nor does it speak, feel, or move (Ἡ εἰκὼν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, εἰ καὶ τὸν χαρακτῆρα ἐκτυποῖ τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλὰ τὰς ψυχικὰς δυνάμεις οὐκ ἔχει, οὔτε γὰρ ζῆ, οὔτε λογιζέται, οὔτε φθίγγεται, οὔτε αἰσθάνεται, οὔτε μέλος κινεῖ). “I do not draw an image of the immortal Godhead. I paint the visible flesh of God seen in icons” [25, col. 1236 C]; “I depict the human nature of Christ” [25, col. 1245 B].

The difference between type and Prototype consists in the fact that the image reveals only the exterior appearance. If there is no difference between the image and the model, then there cannot be an image and a representation and none of these two, because they are correlative notions. This moment is present in the natural image. “A son being the natural image of his father is somewhat different from him, for he is a son, not a father”, says Saint John Damascene (Ἄλλο γὰρ ἔστιν ἡ εἰκὼν, καὶ ἄλλο τὸ εἰκονιζόμενον, καὶ πάντως ὄραται ἐν αὐτοῖς διαφορά, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἄλλο τοῦτο, καὶ ἄλλο ἐκεῖνο) [26].

When a century later patriarch Nicephorus I of Constantinople expressed systematically the nature of likeness and of the difference of the image – the likeness consists in shape (κατὰ τὸ εἶδος) and the difference consists in substance [27], he only resumed clearer and shorter Saint John’s ideas.

4. The teaching of image and resemblance by previous Eastern Fathers

In order to underline the reality of the first element, specifically the likeness and the difference between the image and the model, Saint John brings forward precious proof from his predecessors. He observes that whenever a Father uses the notion of image, he emphasizes the likeness and the difference between the image and the model at the same time.

Thus, Saint Basil the Great, Saint John Chrysostom, Origen, Saint Hilarius of Pictavia (+ 367) and others indicate that the image reproduces only the exterior appearance and not the invisible attributes of the represented object. The likeness of the image to the model is strongly stressed here and some Fathers seem to see in it the nature of the image itself. For this reason, Saint John Chrysostom points out that the appearance of the likeness is the one who determines the image. Thus, the image should be like with the archetype; otherwise, there is no image [28]. The last aspect has also been stated by Saint Cyril of Alexandria (Δεῖν δὲ οἶμαι τὰς εἰκονας γράφεσθαι, πρὸς τὰ ἀρχέτυπα) [29] and Saint Gregory of Nyssa [30]. Saint Gregory of Nazianzen is

more specific: "For this is of the Nature of an Image, to be the reproduction of its archetype, and of that whose name it bears" [31]. Saint Cyril of Alexandria expresses himself in a similar way [32, 33], while in the teaching on icons of the IXth century, patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople, its representative in those times, sees the essence of the image in its likeness to the Archetype.

In contrast to the first element, the likeness of the image to the model and its difference from it, which the Eastern Fathers and Saint John Damascene stressed upon, they failed to render evident the second element, namely the relationship with the original. The image should be an imprint (ἐκτύπωμα), a reproduction and an expression of the model. The image and the model belong to each other in the same way that cause and effect do. When one sees an image, one knows that it is the product of the object represented in the image and needs no other evidence.

5. The revealing character of image after Eastern Fathers

Moreover, Saint John Damascene highlights what results from the imprint of the model: the revelation of the imprinted model. This does not mean that Saint John sees in the image an insufficient and lacking in content imitation of the original. On the contrary, the image is of prime importance an establishing of the model with all its power of acting. This statement is only apparently contradictory to that formerly exposed, which states that the image renders only what is visible in the model, for the image captures in itself for the material eyes only what is subjected in the model to the sight and nothing more. Nevertheless, we can see with our spiritual eyes (ἐν ἁλύφῳ ὁράσει) beyond the material image and we can find the model with all its attributes. The model stands straight beyond the image or in the image itself, but it subjects not to the sight, and can be understood only looking through spiritual eyes. In this way, the model is present in the image, but only spiritually, according to its power of acting. Herein lies the difference between the image and the original, and this reality is more evident in the analysis of the relationship between type and prototype.

Saint John Damascene pays special attention to the third element, which is the revealing and indicatory character of the image: "Every image", says Saint John, "has the revealing and indicatory character of a hidden thing" (Πᾶσα εἰκὼν ἐκφάντορικὴ τοῦ κρυφίου ἐστὶ καὶ δεικτικὴ).

One should take into consideration three things: the revealing character, the indicatory character and the hidden character.

a. The image reveals its model. The revealing character is thus present in order to update us on a hidden thing and to substitute it. Therefore, it has a relative significance. The revealing character turns to be an intermediary between the hidden thing and us and reveals it only because we cannot directly achieve the understanding of the unseen spiritual things. Consequently, the image is like a mirror, through which we discover hidden things [25, col. 1241B].

b. The image shows or indicates the original. This is more than a simple revelation or a simple notification over the represented object. Through its presence, the indicatory character invites us not only to remain, but also to see the represented hidden object. We are able to do this through our spiritual eyes [26, col. 1345A].

c. The image unfolds and brings to light something hidden. That means that the possibility to see the image is stronger than the possibility to see the original. This reality does not contradict the fact that the image and the original should be visible – except for the image in the Holy Trinity.

One can number among the impossibilities to see the original the impossibility to see the object. Saint John Damascene quotes a place from Saint Athanasius the Great, who says that the portrait of the king replaces the absent king and it is honoured instead of him in his kingdom. When the king is present, it would be unseemly to worship the portrait, because the king, the reason for which they honour the portrait, is present in person [34].

The hidden should have a real existence, should be a concrete object or an individual. The fictitious images or the images of things that do not exist in nature are idols and therefore one should reject them [35].

We can trace similar opinions to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, who writes that the form and the image reveal the substance and the substance is revealed by means of image (Ομοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ χαρακτήρ τὴν ὑποστάσιν δείκνυσι, καὶ ὑποστάσις δια χαρακτῆρος γνωρίζεται) [36]. In another place, Saint Gregory points out that one that sees the man who is the image of God can recognise immediately God (ἐν ἡμῖν δεῖξαι τὴν ἰδίαν ἑαυτῶ) [30]. Concerning this, Saint Gregory of Nazianzen writes, “The Son is a concise demonstration and easy setting forth of the Father’s Nature” [37]. Saint Cyril of Alexandria shares the same opinion that the Son is the Father’s Image and this proves in itself Father’s unchangeability (δεικνύων ἐν ἑαυτῶ) [33].

Origen states also that the Son, as the Father’s Image, reveals His Father. Saint Hilarius of Pictavia [38], Saint John Chrysostom [39] say the same thing, as will be the case later, in Saint John Damascene’s times, Saint Germanus, patriarch of Constantinople [22, col. 78D] and Gregory the Second. Saint Nicephorus, patriarch of Constantinople, was a worthy echo of Saint John Damascene. Another author who defended the icons was Dionysius the Areopagite. According to Dionysius, the visible images reveal the invisible divine truth (Εἰκόσιν ἐπὶ τὰς θείας, ὡς δυνατὸν, ἀναγόμεθα θεωρίας) [40]. All visible things discover, as images of the invisible, something that one cannot see.

The moment of revelation is much more emphasised by Saint John Damascene. This moment appears in those places where Saint John describes the icon as a sign of remembrance [25, col. 1248C], as a mirror and as a mystery [26, col. 1320C] or as a victory of Saints and the recollection of their wonderful deeds (Ἡ εἰκὼν γὰρ θρίαμβο ἔστι, καὶ φανέρωσι, καὶ στηλογραφία εἰς μνήμην τῆς νήκης.) [17, col 1296C; 26, col. 1341D]. The revealing and

indicatory character is inherent to the icon. If the image is the form of the likeness of an object and the resemblance to the original, then the image is a revelation in its simple appearance.

The revealing character consists of the resemblance represented on the image that refers to it. Saint John Damascene moves the centre of gravity of the nature of the icon on this moment and shows major interest in it because only through this he could reject the accusation of idolatry. We paint icons just to unfold something hidden; therefore, it has no other significance than being a mediator. Thus, in icon we worship the person it represents.

If one compares the Greek thinking with the Latin thinking with regard to image, one can notice a difference, because the latter does not meet the third element of the icon, which is the revealing and indicatory character. A short surveillance of Augustine's teaching is sufficient for understanding the thinking of the Western Fathers regarding the image, because all the Western Church Fathers from the following centuries based their teaching on the Augustinian thinking, as Thomas d'Aquinas points out (*quia, ut dicit Augustinus*) [Thomas d'Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, I, 35*].

Augustine, and, in after years, all the Western Fathers, granted no importance to the moment of revelation. For Augustine, only two elements belong to the nature of icon: the likeness of the image to the represented object and the relation of origin. For the first element, Augustine does not particularly stress the distinction.

In order to underline the notion of image, Augustine compares it with that of identity (*aequalitas*) and that of similarity (*similitudo*). Consequently, he writes: "There is a need to differentiate between image, identity and similarity. For where is an image, there is also similarity, but not necessarily an identity; where is an identity, there is also similarity, but not necessarily an image; where is similarity, there is no need to be together with it an image or an identity" [41].

The similarity belongs to the image and this can go all the way up to identity, but there is no need of it, because the identity has no contribution to the nature of the image. The similarity is not sufficient in itself, for an egg is not yet the image of another egg. This egg is similar or identical, for it derives not from the other one. In order to have an image, there is necessary the relationship of origin between the image and the model; there is a necessity for the model to produce a similarity [41, col. 86].

The level of similarity can vary. It can go all the way up to the identity in substance, which appears by means of procreation [41, col. 86]. Thus, Augustine and the Western Church Fathers do not acknowledge the moment of revelation in the reality of the image.

On the contrary to Augustine, Saint John Damascene shows that any revealing likeness is an image of the revealed object and thus each existence is one way or another an image. Only God the Father cannot be understood in this way.

6. The teaching about Holy Trinity - foundation of teachings about icons at Saint John Damascene

Saint John Damascene finds the substantiation of such statements in the teaching about the Holy Trinity. He speaks about the likeness between the Father and the Son that goes all the way up to being identical in nature, while being different at the same time. To support this idea, Saint John states that the Son is the living image of the Father, naturally resembling in everything to the invisible God, showing the Father in He Himself [25; 26, col. 1340A].

The Second Person in God the Holy Trinity is the icon of the First Person, for the Second Person joins in He Himself the essential moments of One Image:

- a. Being in everything like to the Father (ἀπαράλλακτος εἰκὼν τοῦ ἀοράτου Θεοῦ; κατὰ πάντα ὁμοία τῷ Πατρὶ) [26, col. 1340A-B]. Still, the distinction between image and Prototype is preserved.
- b. Bearing in Himself the whole Father (ἐν ἑαυτῷ φέρων τὸν Πατέρα) [25].
- c. Showing the Father in Himself (ἐν ἑαυτῷ δεικνύς τὸν Πατέρα) [26, col. 1340A]. Saint Cyril of Alexandria says “that who sees the Son, sees the Father, for the Son, being the Prototype, bears in His Image the Archetype” [42].

Saint John brings out proof from the Holy Scripture in order to confirm his statement. The Holy Scriptures assign to the Son the title of Image. Paul the Apostle says that the Son is the image of the Father: “Who is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1.15) and to the Hebrews, “Who is the brightness of His glory, and the figure of His substance” (Hebrews 1.3). Saint John places a greater emphasis on the moment of the revelation of the Divine Prototype. Being the Prototype of God the Son, God the Father is invisible, “For no man has seen God.” (John 1.18), and again, “Not that anyone has seen the Father” (John 6.46).

The mission of the Son as the Image of the Father is to reveal this invisible God. He accomplishes this mission while He Himself reveals to humankind “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Phillip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14.9). Saint John places the emphasis on the revealing character. According to this, Saint Gregory the Nazianzen writes that the Son is the Father’s Image for He is identical with the Father in Essence or of one substance (ὁμοούσιον) and because He is of the Father and the Only Begotten of Him (τοῦτο ἐκειθεν). The Son is the living reproduction of the Living One (ζωντος καὶ ζωσα) [37].

Saint Hilarius of Pictavium shares the same opinion: “Filius autem Patris...imago est: quia viventis viva imago est, et ex eo natus non differat genere sed significat autorem” [38, col. 230f].

Saint John adds to the statement that the Son is the Image of the invisible Father the following: “The Holy Spirit is the image of the Son” (καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, εἰκὼν τοῦ Υἱοῦ) [26, col. 1340B].

Saint John Damascene identifies the essential point of the icon in the Person of the Holy Spirit. He points out again the resemblance, the distinction and the revealing character of the image. The Holy Spirit is the perfect and unchangeable image of the Son, differing only in His procession. The Son is begotten, but does not proceed (ἀπαράλλακτός ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ Υἱοῦ, τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ἐν μόνῳ τῷ ἐκπορευτῷ τὸ διάφορον ἔχον) [26, col. 1340B].

The Holy Spirit reveals the Son, “For no one can say the Lord Jesus, except in the Holy Spirit” (I Corinthians 12.3). Through this we can understand the subsequent way of conceiving the Divine Persons: The Holy Spirit is the first one to be conceived: “Through the Holy Spirit we know Christ, the Son of God and God, and in the Son we look upon the Father” says Saint John [26, col. 1340B].

Vice versa is also true: the Father reveals Himself through His Image, the Son, and the Son reveals Himself through His Image, the Holy Spirit: “For in things that are conceived by nature, language is the interpreter, and spirit is the interpreter of language” [26, col. 1340B]. Saint Basil the Great states that only through the Holy Spirit that enlightens us can we have a clear knowledge; we fix our eyes on the beauty of the image of the invisible God, and through the image are led up to the supreme beauty of the contemplation of the archetype [43].

Thus, two images co-exist in the Holy Trinity. The Son is the Father’s image and the Holy Spirit is the Son’s image. The Holy Spirit is the Son’s image in the same manner the Son is the Father’s image, as Saint Athanasius the Great expresses. Οἷαν γὰρ ἔγνωμεν ἰδιότητα τοῦ Υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα, ταύτην ἔχειν τὸ Πνεῦμα πρὸς τὸν Υἱὸν εὐρησομεν [44]. Saint John Damascene takes no further steps, but he is content with this statement, that the Son is the Father’s image and the Holy Spirit is the Son’s image.

We need to briefly survey the conception of Blessed Augustine about the image in God, so that we can understand the teaching of the Western Church Fathers regarding this aspect. One should remember that they took as starting point for their writings the Augustinian conception.

For Augustine, the notion of image in the Holy Trinity is relevant only to the Son of God, because the two elements that belong to the notion of image are suitable only for the Son. The Son of God is the Only Begotten of the Father and of one substance with Him. That is why we can assign the title of being the Father’s image only to Him [45]. The equality between image and model is absolute herein. In addition, the temporal distinction between the common father and the common son disappeared [41].

The title of being image cannot be used for the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is not begotten and this attribute belongs to the nature of image. Moreover, the title of being image is not suitable for the Father, taking into account that the image stays in a necessary relationship with its original and for this reason it cannot be used in relation to the Father.

Returning to the Trinitarian grounding that Saint John uses with regard to the revealing character of the image we should emphasize that Saint John approaches in the relationship between type and prototype not only the problem of the resemblance of the image to the model and their distinction, but also their unity.

7. The mutual relationship between type and prototype at Eastern Fathers and Saint John Damascenes

Saint John chooses as starting point for expressing the relationship between type and prototype in his first treatise a passage belonging to Saint Basil the Great. Saint Basil uses the comparison with the king's portrait in order to make accessible to human understanding the unique divinity that lies in the Father and in the Son. According to the distinction of Persons, the Father and the Son are two Persons, both one and the same, for they behold the same Nature. In the same way, we speak of the king and of his image, but not of two kings; there is only one king.

The comparison is the following: the king's image can bear the name of king, but we speak not of two kings. The majesty is not cloven in two, nor the glory divided. The sovereignty and authority over us is one, and so the doxology ascribed by us is not plural but one, because the honour paid to the image passes on to the prototype (ἡ της εἰκονος τιμη ἐπὶ τὸ πρωτότυπον διαβαίνει) [43, col. 149C].

Saint John goes further on: "If the king's image is the king, then the Christ's image is Christ Himself and the Saint's icon is the Saint Himself. The sovereignty is not cloven in two, nor the glory divided. The honour given to the image is referred to the prototype" (Εἰ ἡ εἰκὼν του βασιλέως ἐστὶ βασιλεὺς, καὶ ἡ εἰκὼν του Χριστου Χριστὸς, καὶ ἡ εἰκὼν του ἀγίου ἅγιος . Καὶ οὔτε τὸ κράτος σχίζεται, οὔτε ἡ δόξα διαμερίζεται, ἀλλ' ἡ δόξα της εἰκόνας του εἰκονιζομένου γίνεται) [25, col. 1264A].

Saint Basil the Great uses the same comparison with the king's image against Arians and Sabellians, in order to explain how the divine substance subsists in Three Persons. For this reason, he writes "The likeness of the image to the model unites them both so tight that they are in reality one. Thus, one who recognises in king's image his king acknowledges not two kings. One who states that the king's image is the king himself does not give up his emperor by doing this. On the contrary, the one who honours the king's image confirms the king's dignity. Thus, if the king's image is the king, then moreover should the model of the image be king." [46]

In his third treatise, Saint John Damascene brings to attention one passage from Saint Athanasius the Great, where the relationship between the type and the Prototype is rendered precisely: the king's image shows forth his form and likeness. The king is the likeness of his image. The likeness of the king is indelibly impressed upon the image, so that anyone looking at the image sees the king, and again, anyone looking at the king recognises that the image is his

likeness. He who worships the image worships the king in it. The image is his form and likeness. Vice versa is also true: one who sees the king will recognise it immediately in the person represented in the image. Being an indelible likeness, the image might answer a man, who expressed the wish to see the king after contemplating it, by saying, "The king and I are one. I am in him and he is in me. That which you see in me you see in him, and the man who looks upon him looks at the same in me." He, who worships the image (προσκυνει), worships the king in it. The image is nothing more than the form and the likeness of the king [26, col. 1404D-1405B].

Saint John discovered in these places the substantiation of his teaching concerning the relationship between the type and the prototype. The king's image is the king himself; the Christ's image is Christ Himself and the saint's image is the saint himself. Thus, the type and the prototype are one and the same. They are one in a single form, in a single likeness. Thus, through icon we can see the source. There is a mistake to separate the type from the prototype and to treat them distinctly. They are so tightly knitted that only the difference in substance remains. In this reside the power and the plenty of grace of the icon. That is why the honour and the reverence in front of the icon are the same with the honour and the reverence in front of the prototype.

So, what importance should one ascribe to the icons? Saint John Damascene gives us an answer: The icon should be filled with the same divine power and grace as the Saint. For "the saints in their lifetime were filled with the Holy Spirit, and when they are no more, His grace abides with their spirits and with their bodies in their tombs, and also with their likenesses and holy images, not by nature, but by grace and divine power" (οὐ κατὰ οὐσίαν, ἀλλὰ χάριτι καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ) [25, col. 1249D].

Observing this statement, we can acknowledge that the entire divine power and abundance of grace of the Son of God in Person, of the Mother of God and of the saints, according to their deeds, are all present in the icons. So with regard to this, Saint John Damascene points out that the icons bear the name of their prototype and are sanctified through the name they bear, either God's name or the saint's name (Θεοῦ καὶ φίλων Θεοῦ ὀνόματι ἁγιαζομένων, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο Θείου Πνεύματος ἐπισκιάζομένων χάριτι) [17, col. 1297]. If the prototype was filled with the Holy Spirit, the icon is filled with the Holy Spirit in the same way (Πνεύματος ἁγίου εἰσι πεπληρομένα [τὰ εἰκονισματα]) [25, col.1252B].

The icon replaces the prototype. Saint John brings as testimony our Saviour's words: "And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon" (Matthew 23.21-22). Hence, the words "who shall swear by the icon, sweareth by the One represented in it" (Καὶ ὁ ὀμνῶν ἐν τῇ εἰκόνι, ὀμνύει ἐν τῷ εἰκονιζομένῳ ὑπ' αὐτῆς) are quite well grounded [17, col. 1308C]. Where is His sign dwelle He Himself? (Ἐνθα χάρ ἄν ἦ τὸ σημεῖον, ἐκεῖ καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται) [47].

In this resides the fear of the evil spirits in front of icons [25, col. 1264A]. Saint John founded that, through the passage where it is written about the burning bush, which is an icon of the Mother of God, the Holy Scriptures confirms his statement that the icon is filled with grace. This icon was so full of grace that it sanctified even the ground where it appeared.

When Moses desired to get closer to God, He said to him “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exodus 3.5). Now if the spot on which Moses saw an image of Our Lady was holy, how much more the image itself? And not only is it holy, but I venture to say it is the holy of holies, writes Saint John Damascene [17, col. 1308B].

The highly veneration we give to the Mother of God is referred to the One who was born of her [47, col. 1172C]. We worship (προσκυνουµεν) them, then, as the king is honoured (θεραπεύεται) through the honour given (θεράποντα) to a loved servant. He is honoured as a minister in attendance upon his master - as a valued friend, not as king [26, 1352D].

8. The Incarnation of Son of God-foundation of structure of icons

God Himself first made an image, and showed forth images (Αὐτὸς ὁ Θεὸς πρῶτος ἐποίησεν εἰκόνα, καὶ ἔδειξεν εἰκόνας). He “made the first man after His own image” (Genesis 1.27) [17, col. 1308A], begot His only begotten Son, His word, the living image of Himself, the natural and unchangeable image of His eternity (Αὐτὸς ὁ Θεὸς πρῶτος ἐγέννησε τὸν μονογενῆ Υἱὸν καὶ Λόγον αὐτοῦ, εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ ζῶσαν) [26, col. 1345B].

Saint John Damascene is the first theologian who substantiates his teaching on icons on the grounding of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Incarnation of the Son of God is the reason for us to reproduce the image of the visible Incarnated God. What we desire to draw in icons, says Saint John Damascene, is His visible human form, His flesh, the Face of our Lord and Saviour; and not to give expression to His invisible divine nature (Οὐ τὴν ἀόρατον εἰκονίζω Θεότητα, ἀλλ’ εἰκονίζω Θεοῦ τὴν ὀραθεῖσαν σάρκα) [25, col. 1240AB; 1269 B].

Saint John Damascene concludes: “I have looked upon the human form of God, and my soul has been saved (Εἶδον εἶδος Θεοῦ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον, καὶ ἐσώθη μου ἡ ψυχὴ). I gaze upon the image of God, as Jacob did (Genesis 32.30), though in a different way. Jacob sounded the note of the future, seeing with immaterial sight, whilst the image of Him who is visible to flesh is burnt into my soul”.

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