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# THE ORTHODOX ICON LOGOCENTRIC MEANINGS AND FORMATIVE DIMENSIONS

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## Abstract

The icon is a tangible sign of God, who is a spiritual person, being imperceptible through our physical senses. Due the Incarnation of Christ, we claim the existence of icons in the world and also the tangible way for man to meet both spiritual and physical at once. In the text analysis suggested here we sought to reveal that icon is a way of immanence of the divine Being in human life and especially to reveal the fact that life in Christ or the spiritual life prevails everything else. Icon facilitates, unifies and creates a beneficent bridge between the two plans/dimensions of life: the timeless, eternal one and the temporal, fleeting one, in order to fill our existence with the Life-Christ and to make us ascend to the eternal life.

*Keywords:* icon, patrimony restoration, Fathers, spirituality, Christ

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## 1. Introduction

*"I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing"* (John 15.5). Starting from this advice of the Saviour, we will try to demonstrate in this study that the art of the Church is a spiritual and formative art.

Acting almost exclusively in the field of matter, with the purpose of mastering it and gathering as many material values as possible, the modern man has undergone a degradation down to matter. Man has been infected by its inert character limited in space and time; matter has suppressed his freedom, paralyzing his will, breaking his enthusiasm, subduing him. The contact with the machine has also had unsuspected repercussions on the modern man. The automatic and static quickness, regularity and perfection, and its advantages favoured the increase in his ambition and greediness up to exasperation, as well as his unmeasured confidence in his own power, the illusion of his virtual almightiness; the machine, which is the concretization of matter by excellence,

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has now become another tyrant that has to be paid its due tribute. At the same time, the human values have decayed under the level of the matter and ... of the machine; for pleasure and material interests man nowadays is capable of sacrificing even the life of his fellow men, and he who owns and operates a machine, however retarded, can better and reduce to slavery the greatest genius if the latter does not have one. We witness a reverse of values to the detriment of moral values and to the advantage of the material ones.

Starting from these few ideas it can be noticed that the 'mechanic' regularity of life has stamped in the activity of the modern man an automatic character and rhythm, which kill his spontaneity and take away his initiative. Having to execute the same stereotype moves his entire life, most of the time, – extending our observations to even the intellectual work – man becomes, in time, a walking automaton, a robot-man. By virtue of inertia, the automatism will prolong naturally to the rest of his life and activity, to his spare time, thus becoming – by habit – his second nature. Being unable to get rid of boredom, he will search for relaxation in satisfying his pleasure. This automatism favours indeed dispositions for discipline and perfect organization, but it is not a useful discipline and organization, and as it is not sprung from man's freedom, it ends by tyrannizing him.

The enhancement and improvement of the quick information means brought a sort of delirium of the man. And if we were to refer to the situation in the contemporary art in general, we could easily notice that the same 'attempts' are observed, called experiments, tries, efforts etc. Maybe if we remained at least at first at the level of language as regards the adherence to the past, we would see that our efforts and endeavours would not be in vain, but transfigured through the communication with Christ.

Knowing this, we can see everything that occurs on the globe – to people and for people – but without people actually participating to other people's suffering, except visually and at auditory level (maintaining the language often used in art) will actually bring more suffering or will fall into ferocious subjectivism. From a mere search for information, which often turns into a waste of time and gossip, one often gets – due to the multitude and quick sequence of information – to a neuro-asthenic variety and sensational circumstance. Man's sensitivity may thus be altered and intoxicated through energy, rush, over- or under-sizing of realities and the sensations he is experiencing. Therefore, because man's sensitiveness is too weak to vibrate, he needs brutal stimulants [1]. That is why the number of commercials increases and they radicalize themselves up to the absurd. Hence, we can rightfully ask ourselves: what is noticed and what is done for the man today in the art field (even sacred art) as well as in the field of the religious-Orthodox patrimony restoration, the music field, the field of culture in general considered a means of spiritual ascension? We cannot give an exhaustive answer in this study, but what we can at least try to prove is the unquestionable fact that religious art first of all and not its 'derivates – as everything created by the contemporary man is based at least on a grain of truth, even when the divine is questioned – is a spiritual effort or strive.

As every man is born with the idea of God and has in their being the relation to Him, the same thing occurs in art. Only the means differ and sometime or too often the will oriented to the good. In what follows, we will see how man accomplishes his life through art, and art recovers the man.

## **2. The spiritual man and the art he creates**

In elaborating our study we will start still from what we notice in the contemporary real world. The modern man is innovative in everything. He is always looking for: a better life, a better social and family condition. He seems to never stop in his undertaking. Therefore, we assert from the very beginning that all his activities are not bad in themselves. But not all are useful to him. The recent man gets informed, communicates more with his neighbours, and gets involved assiduously – like a treasure hunter – in everything he needs to. Unfortunately, he is so used to the poison of the sensational news, that expects to see them every day like entertainment, with perverted impatience and feels discontent when he does not have it. Hence, the adversities and wars for no reason rather amuse him, like sports competitions, than grieve him. This is why, when they stop, the reader seems to regret that a source that appeases his thirst for sensational ceased. But what is happening in the art field? And is it accessible to anyone, both as regards creation and perception level?

The excess of organization and mechanization leads to bureaucracy, in which man does not matter more than a functioning part and to taylorism (that excessive division of work, up to the point of complete identification of the human person to the petty and insignificant function he carried out automatically in a factory). The mechanic technique regime produces in the sphere of the individual and social life a depersonalization and levelling phenomenon, up to the creation of a standard individual, having the possibility of reproducing him in series, like mechanic manufacturing items. Indeed, “the technical civilization is impersonalistic through its own principle” [2], according to the Russian thinker Nicolai Berdiaev; impersonalism is its natural and necessary condition. But the person is opposed to the machine through the one thing that makes every person God’s image in man, an autonomous centre of energy, feeling and reasoning, a free being.

The entourage in which man, as a being participating to the life of the world, was called by Max Picard ‘a frame of the escape from God’ [3]. In all times, sometimes man ran even from God. Nevertheless something differs in the man’s escape today from the escape from other times: in older days, faith was the normal thing, it was always in front of man and there was a world of objective faith. The escape, on the contrary, occurs only in the isolated individual; it happened only when the individual detached himself from the world of faith by decision. If he wanted to escape, first he had to create his escape. Today, it is the other way around: faith is minimized and even destroyed. Therefore, not faith but escape is man’s ‘objective world’. And any circumstance in which man can get is beforehand – without any action from man – an implied

escape circumstance: in this world everything seems to exist shaped as escape. Man lives only by escaping. Life and escape are one reality. The individual is first of all a fugitive; only by reflection does he discover that there could exist something stable. Our fathers have noticed that the entire disquietude of man takes place in his inner forum, a continuous coming and going that is reflected also in something exterior, in an exterior dynamics of escape. Escape has become independent, man has become independent and even has become a bodily entity with its own laws. It is so autonomous that man escapes even if he forgot to escape. It does not even need to be a special act to run from God any more. In an escape situation there is no pause, no exchange between running and not running, escape lasts and is implied, like the air; it is so much implied as if nothing else ever existed. This is the world of escape: not a world of the necessary, but a world of the possibility. Nothing needs to exist as it is; it can only be, without being necessary though. Max Picard analyzes this essential tragedy in a wide sphere of the existence. The two worlds are put face to face: the world of faith and the world of escape (emigration) from the universe of faith. Faith is the theological virtue of adhesion to revelation, to God, it roots, and founds a life in Christ, Who – being the Son of God – made Himself son of man in order to make the man son of God.

Oswald Spengler considers the complete lack of religiosity of our century a certain sign of the decline of the modern Faustian culture [4]. According to this thinker, a culture is by its nature religious and civilizations are in their essence a-and irreligious. The main preoccupations of the civilized man from the big cities boil down, according to Spengler, to the worry for food and efficiency and hygiene issues, to whom – in an age of true culture – religions did not pay any attention.

This situation we have talked about and in which man finds himself is according to the Holy Fathers the consequence of the deformation of the manner of perceiving correctly the reality, replacing the Creator with the creation and blending Him with it. The influence exerted by materiality on the human being – body and soul – is the most eloquent proof of its materiality. The biological mortality, as an absence of the life lived by the sensitive souls of every age, an absence of the meaning, is seen by our Fathers as a second nature of man after the fall and ‘was brought from the nature of the dumb beings onto the created nature for immortality through oeconomy’. The deiform characteristics and inclinations of ‘the image of God’ in man deviated from their natural direction and functionality, in accordance with their co-natural reason, they got distorted, they were subject to irrational nature and the characteristics of the latter have been put on by man as irrational clothes (skin clothes = dermatinoi chitones). The life imposed by man’s ‘skin clothes’ is dead or biological or irrational, because, in its last analysis, it is material. According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, the ‘skin clothes’ are the bodily mind. So it is a general yoking of the man to materiality, with the incessant flow of the elements that make up the material world with his continuous movement and change, which make him fiery and ‘carna’ in his whole.

Before wearing 'skin clothes', the man wore a gown 'woven by God', his psycho-somatic coat was woven from the gift, light and glory of God. The first men created 'were dressed with the heaven glory ... the heaven glory covered them better than any coat'. It is the garment of 'the image of God' in man, the human nature before the fall made with God's breath and built in a deiform manner. In that garment, 'the image of God' shined and was constituted not by an 'external figure' or a 'colour', but the 'non-fieri' and the 'non-immorality', which are characteristics in which 'divine beauty is contemplated'.

Therefore, for the beauty-making man, the continuous spiritual life is not a subject imposed by an orthodox system of courses or by a theological institution, but 'science' of the permanent authentic Christian behaviour: during and beyond artistic creation; the artistic creation is the acquirement of the Gift about which Saint Seraphim of Sarov for instance, namely the acquirement of a conduct, of an inner appearance first of all as well as an outer appearance that shows the presence of God in that man.

Scientifically, the practical spiritual rules of man's situation in relation to God, do not represent so much a new subject, but rather the lively connection, of authentic life in Christ, by getting in contact with the spiritual man, with the direct model of living and knowing the Gift for the 'makeup' of the artist. The latter has to accomplish the authentic life connection between himself and God by means of a confessor. His spiritual formation expressed through: prayer, fight with his vices, his admission and awareness of his affiliation to the Orthodox Church will represent the concrete life of the beautiful man that works in the field of religious art. The key to his activity is not the technique or talent inherited from his parents, but it is rather a spiritual, liturgical and dogmatic one.

He who works in the art field has as a central characteristic of his existence the Eucharistic use of his natural powers with the purpose of the reformation of the world and an approach to God. Here we deal with a potential unit, as Saint Maximus the Confessor explains, that it exists between the material world and human body, between the body and the soul and between the soul and God. We know – he says – that "*the soul is in the middle between God and matter and has unifying powers in relation to both of them*" [5]. Adam's purpose was to achieve in act the unity in potency, by using correctly his unifying powers, thus unifying and suppressing the four great divisions of the universe: the division of the human being into man and woman, of the earth into paradise and inhabited world, of the sensitive nature into sky and earth, of the created nature in sensitive and intelligible, and eventually the fifth and highest and implicit division: between the creation and its Creator.

Participating to the common search for humanity, of rediscovering nature and the meaning of their existence, the Holy Fathers accepted that man is a 'rational' or 'political animal' (*Zoon logikon kai politikon*), and they did not question that he is 'what he eats' or 'what he produces' or 'what he feels', but they added that his true greatness is not to be found in these things, but in the fact that he is given 'the commandment of making himself God'. They emphasized the fact that man accomplishes his existence as long as he ascends to

God and unites with him. "I call a man him who parted himself from the humanity and advanced toward God Himself" [6]. In parallel, they revealed profoundly and subtly man's nature when he is connected to God and what he becomes when this connection breaks, how its different psycho-somatic functions work in both cases, his existence perception when he is united to or apart from God.

Man's original vocation is of unifier (*syndesmos* = ring of the creation), and this is possible only by the discipline and education of the sinning side of his being and by his orientation to God. Life, as an exercise and suffering, has the objective of earning the divine love and compassion and needs the complete strain of his will conjugated with His liberating and purifying Gift. Reviewing the tragic commonness of the daily existence and comparing to the purity emanated by the pages of the *Philokalia*, we can achieve what the beauty creator has to transmit to us: the love for beauty!

It is very well known that art achieves the fulfilment of the human up to a point; in order to reach the union to God, there has to be more. Art, even religious art, is not the mere acquirement of knowledge and notions, either spiritual or confessional, but it is first the feeling of this knowledge that belongs to God. And feeling means a permanent collaboration to Him, a continuous exercise of applying the evangelic precepts in daily life (according to John 14.6: *odos-alitheia-Zoi*).

Hence, an important aspect that we are showing here is the tight connection between man and his work of art. It goes without saying that an authentic spiritual art cannot be assimilated if the creator-man does not know the Holy Scripture, the History of Church, prayer and the liturgical practice in Church. One cannot even imagine the fact that the Holy Fathers of our Church did not know the Scripture or the history, the Orthodox dogma and tradition. In fact, he who did not know first of all the practices of the church and did not apply them would stop being a model or spiritual Father in the conscience of the Church.

### **3. The master-apprentice relation and the art field in Church**

The person who climbs a mountain for the first time needs to follow a marked itinerary: he must be accompanied by someone who has already climbed the mountain and knows the way. This is the precise role of the 'Abba' or the confessor father in monastery and not only: he is also meant to be a companion and a guide. Greeks call him 'gheron', and Russians call him 'prior': a title that in both languages means: improved old man [7].

From the very beginning of monarchism, Eastern Christianity emphasized the importance of the obedience to an old man. Saint Anthony the Great said: "I know monks who, after many efforts fell and went out of their mind, because they rested in their own work and kid themselves, as they had not understood the commandment: «ask your parent and he shall tell you»".

The image of the master was and is an unquestionable reality in the field of religious art, too. We cannot even imagine that Saint Luke and then all those who wrote, composed or accomplished something in the field of painting or liturgy in Church did it 'on their own'. He is essentially a charismatic 'prophetic' figure and he received his service as a chirothesia with a direct contribution of the Holy Spirit. He is not ordered by a human hand, but his hand is guided by the power of God. He is an expression of the Church, an 'event-man' who overcomes the mere function he holds. His work is somehow attached to the confessor's, defined precisely in the institutional framework of the Church.

As we know, Jews considered that painting and praise of icons was an infringement of the second commandment of the Decalogue: "*You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them*" (Exodus 20.4-5, Deuteronomy 5-13). The interdiction of iconography was a momentary pedagogical measure though, until the coming of Christ, protecting the Jewish people from the temptation of falling into the praise of idols of the peoples with whom they had come in contact along history. Nevertheless, Christ's incarnation made possible the painting of His face. Canon 82 of the Quinisext Synod (7<sup>th</sup> century) allowed the icon representation of the Saviour and its praise: "*In some pictures of the venerable icons, a lamb is painted to which the Precursor points his finger, which is received as a type of grace, indicating beforehand through the Law, our true Lamb, Christ our God. Embracing therefore the ancient types and shadows as symbols of the truth, and patterns given to the Church, we prefer grace and truth, receiving it as the fulfilment of the Law. In order therefore that that which is perfect may be delineated to the eyes of all, at least in coloured expression, we decree that the figure in human form of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, Christ our God, be henceforth exhibited in images, instead of the ancient lamb, so that all may understand by means of it the depths of the humiliation of the Word of God, and that we may recall to our memory his conversation in the flesh, his passion and salutary death, and his redemption which was wrought for the whole world.*"

Comments are needless. Still, we will remind that Monophysitism, a Christological sect born in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, which asserted one nature of the Saviour, the divine one, considered that upon the Incarnation of the Lord, His human nature was absorbed completely by His divine nature. Taking such ideas both from the Jews and from the Monophysites, their followers back then and nowadays have an abusive or excessive attitude towards icons. To us it is unmistakable that the icon is the most significant symbolic object from the context of the Orthodox liturgical universe. The Church has cultivated an artistic 'language' that expresses the same truth as the spoken language, and this language of painting is clear and precise. In time, the dogmatic content of the iconographic face was included in education, combining harmoniously the

historic realism with symbolism (in this regard the canons of the Trullan Synod from 692 are strong arguments).

I think that the Christian's spiritual relation with the icon or what we have mentioned in the subtitle above, faith and the icon, can be seen very clearly in the life and activity of two great coryphaei of Orthodoxy: Saint John of Damascus and Saint Theodore the Studite. The ideas of Saint John of Damascus (+749) regarding the praise of the holy icons can be summarized as follows:

- a. "The icon is a resemblance, a model, an imprint of someone, showing in itself the one represented in the icon", in other words, it enlightens the original. The icon should be worshiped, not absolutely bowed to or venerated, which are reserved only for God.
- b. As He took the image of a subject, we can paint the icon of the Son of God, Who, by incarnation, joined the category of those who can be represented in icons.
- c. The praise of the icon is oriented towards the one represented in the icon. Consequently, we bow to icons, but we do not bow to matter, but through it, to the ones represented in them.
- d. The icon has an educational role also, being like a book, especially for those who cannot read, but it also contains the divine grace and the power of making miracles.

Another fierce fighter against iconoclasm was Saint Theodore (759-826) from the Studios Monastery (Constantinople), therefore called the Studite. Immediately after the interdiction of praising icons, he organized a demonstrative procession of icons around his monastery, on the Sunday of Pentecost from the year 815. The emperor back then exiled him to several places, but the saint urged incessantly the monks scattered because of the persecution not to abdicate from the faith in the holy icons. Due to his life, he remained a model of faith and service.

As we know, Christian art appeared and developed starting the 1<sup>st</sup> century after Christ [8]. Nevertheless, practically, it is hard to support this thesis as there are no artistic creations from that century. The first Christian communities appear and spread on the Roman territory. The eastern part of the Roman Empire was dominated by the Hellenistic art, and the western part by the Roman art. During the first three centuries, the Christian art searched for newer means of expression, having to abandon gradually the ones specific to the Hellenistic art. The paleochristian artist used to take over completely the classic aesthetics, the Hellenistic iconography. Along time, some of them revealed an attitude of denial of the possibilities of expressing themselves through images of the sacraments of the Incarnation and Resurrection of the Lord, thus of the content of the new religion, with its new vision upon the world. To my mind, this was the engine that started the iconoclast movement. Nonetheless, this movement was promptly counteracted by artists who did not accept the impossibility of expressing the Christian mysteries through images, as they considered that images could express even more than words: "*If a Christian approaches you and asks you to*

*show your faith, take him to church and show him the holy images*" (Saint John of Damascus).

We should take as an example the icon of the Image of Christ called: '*Saviour Not-Made-By-Human-Hand*'. The icon is part of the images attributed to Christ Himself, both in the West and in the East. This icon is meant to certify the historic event represented by Christ, the authenticity of His image, as the gospels and the tradition of the Church represent it. Christ's icon generally expresses synthetically the Christological fundamental dogma, of the unity between sky and earth, the hypostatic union of the true God and the true Man [9].

If we are to refer to the symbolism of the icon itself, we notice that Christ's portrait, as the saints' that were painted along the centuries, is made normally through a composition structured on four concentric circles. In this structure, starting with the most inner, the profound meaning of spiritual life and of the Confessor himself is hidden. The first circle – a central point of all circles – is on the forehead, between the eyes, at the nose root. Generally, it is invisible, it is not sketched. It is the circle of communion from the Holy Spirit, which means that it is the inspiring point, as it means the proper indwelling of the life-giving Lord. The second circle includes the forehead and the eyes: it is the circle of the soul, the spiritual world, the world of intelligence, of feeling and will. The third circle embraces the hair, the beard and represents the body, man's dimension closest to the earth. The hair falls out and grows white; the mouth expresses the memory of physical vulnerability and mortality of the human body. The fourth circle is the circle of the cleanest light in the icon, of the most golden and brightest yellow. Catholics call it an aureole and the Orthodox call it a nimbus. It is the light of the Holy Spirit, who, from the most inner circle penetrates the entire spiritual world and envelopes the world of the telluric, of the body in such a perceptible luminosity that even we, the others, can see it.

As it is known [10], in icons, Christ is represented with a crossed wreath, inside which the letters **O** (to the right of Jesus Christ),  $\omega$  (above Jesus Christ's head), **N** (to the left of Jesus Christ) are written, meaning '*I am that I am*', as God named Himself to Moses on Mount Horeb (Exodus 3.14). The crossed wreath has three variants and can be replaced with the monogrammed or stellated one. The word *NIKA* that appears on the Saviour's cross means '*He is victorious*'. The blessing hand does not have the three fingers united as for the sign of the holy cross, but only the index finger is united to the ring finger. Hence the index finger and the bending of the middle finger means Jesus' name – IC (=S). The thumb and the ring finger united and the bending of the pinkie means Christ's name, XC (=H). The two gathered fingers give the letter C (=S) – the pinkie bent forward. And this is how we find out a new meaning of the Lord's hand fingers, through a gesture that shows not only His name, but that constitutes a true spiritual doctrine [10, p. 229].

Thus the icon is a concrete sign of God, a spiritual being, imperceptible by the physical senses, but by incarnation and then through the icon descending towards His concrete shape in order to meet the spiritual and physical man. God

is felt like a force, like a presence because He is Almighty. The icon brings to the believer's mind the archetypal image of God as the One Who protects and can do anything. The icon holds the capacity specific to the positive spiritual world – it is a sacred object. Recognizing this characteristic of the icon, it is asserted synthetically what theologians say: the icon is a place of the presence of the Holy Spirit, meaning that it is full of the holy grace, God's energy, and can transmit this grace to the person who prays, through this holiness gift he who looks at it prays to God. The holy grace is received by the icon through the service of sanctification, after which it becomes a cult object. The icon is sacred also because it represents the image of a holy person. By sanctification, the icon becomes God's object. By sanctification, any thing is cleaned and offered to God.

In the brief analysis above we tried to show that the icon is a way of immanence of the divinity Being in the human life and especially the fact that life in Christ or spiritual life prevails. God is defined by the verb *to be*. 'I am that I am' – He introduces Himself to Moses, which shows that He is the fountain of life, the life-giver. There are at least two steps of life: the existence of beings and material things and spiritual existence. Both through the former and through the latter, meaning only through a Christian living, do we aspire to the true spiritual life. The icon facilitates, unites and creates a benefic bridge between the two plans of life: the atemporal, eternal one, and the ephemeral, transient one, with the purpose of filling our existence with life and ascending to the eternal one.

The two coryphaei mentioned above reveal a triple connection between the spiritual and the iconographic reality in Church. This triple relation is: icon-prayer; icon-piousness; icon-holy persons or the cherishing of the holy person.

The relation icon-prayer mentions the highest and most frequent manner of the believer's relation to God. Prayer is the believer's (being) way of communicating to God (Creator), and the icon is a way that facilitates man's prayer to God. The icon urges to prayer, rises one's thought to God, as in a short prayer, which can be the beginning of a prayer. Thinking about the sacred space, sometimes man overcomes the tough reality of the concrete life. The prayer through the icon, as through a window to God has an intimacy character in the dual and profound relationship of communication.

In our private cult, usually in a room the icon is placed against the eastern wall, in a special place, which supports the intimacy of prayer. The positive role of the icon for prayer is the fourth factor defining for the icon, identified through the factorial analysis of the survey outcomes.

The icon-piousness relation is visible when we think about the first state of the Christian in front of the icon, which is a pious state, as in front of God and favours the apparition of the feeling of repentance for our personal mistakes. But the catechetical role of the icon comes into operation: it reminds of the Saviour's suffering for our redemption, of the saints' lives, who are people just like us and acquired forgiveness and eternal joy, consequently the Christian starts to meditate on God's love, eventually getting to know Him, which is the purpose of God's relationship to the man. The result of the prayer that we make up in front

of the icon of God, Virgin Mary or a saint, whichever his breed on Romanian, Greek, Russian, Bulgarian etc. land, is spiritual restoration, the entry to God's Kingdom and becoming the same breed with Christ. Concretely this means recovering self-confidence, introspection, spiritual strength, power and new forces. If we see things from the spiritual perspective, it is a process, a method of healing man through image. After the self face has deteriorated because of the sin, man can go through the restoration process by means of the Sacraments, and among these there is the icon. The next stage of the above mentioned process is the apparition of positive feelings, which include the state of mind of the person who prays: he feels much better, calm settles on his soul, because he stopped having remorse; thus the spiritual peace ached for is proven to be a fruit of the Holy Spirit, a state from heaven. Certainly this is why it is so much searched for and cherished by Orthodox Christians.

The icon-holy persons relation is seen through the ritual of bowing down to icons; this is actually a manner of bowing down to God, praising His face, His Mother and His Saints – God's Friends – the original connection before the prayer in spirit and truth is created. This is a defining factor of the icon. Those who know the therapeutic spiritual effect of the icon, treasure it, they have it on them all the time, the place of the icon is not related to the eastern part of room any more, as the person is always praying, they feel the need to be protected all the time by the divine presence, consequently these believers take the icon with them wherever they go. They appreciate the importance of the icon to them personally as being very high. The importance of the icon can derive also from its beauty, from its artistic value.

The icon is present also in the public cult, characterizing specially the Orthodox Church: the icon is present inside the Church, is involved in the cult as a cult object in the incense ritual, of the prayers at the imperial icons etc; to the common believer, the icon from the church is a praising object, thus they bow down and cross themselves. The crossing sign is a gestural testimony of the faith in the Redemption through the Saviour's Sacrifice, the believer expressing his affiliation to the Christian cult. The crossing act is the first defining factor for the icon, identified by the factorial analysis of the survey outcomes.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The result of the prayer in front of the icon of God and His saints is spiritual restoration, namely the recovery of self-confidence, through introspection and the feeling of spiritual strengthening. Only this way does the Christian receive power, new forces and can praise God for everything.

Orthodox iconography renders precisely the education of the Church about Christ the Saviour, about the Mother of God or any other of the saints. The icon is a calling (from the Latin term 'vocatus' meaning 'to call', 'to cry'), which means that those who 'make' an icon have to give a special calling to holiness. The church distinguishes in what it calls a vision the common part from the metaphysical part, by contemplating what is not seen in what is seen,

and it contemplates the eternal in the ephemeral. On this line we may assert that the true icon expresses the spiritual experience of holiness. There are two dialogue axes in the icon: the first one represents the dialogue between the icon painter and God, which is the communication that generates the other axis, the secondary one, of the brother who will approach the icon and communicate to God, too.

Unmistakably the Orthodox icon represents the most significant object from the context of the Orthodox liturgical, social, family etc. universe. The church cultivated an artistic language expressing the same truth as the spoken language, and this language of the holy painting is clear and precise. The dogmatic content of the iconographic face harmoniously combines the historic realism and the spiritual reality of the life beyond.

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