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Dogmatic landmarks in Russian and Romanian iconography

The Icon of the Holy Trinity

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Abstract. The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity of one being represents the basis of our Christian faith and living, at the same time being the living soul of the Church, which it makes live from the triune life, graciously shared with all its members, in an endless kenosis of love, which elevates, perfects and deifies.

Keywords. iconography, the fundamental theme of theology, painting, icon, the icon of the Holy Trinity, the canons of the Orthodox Church, tradition, byzantine

Introduction

I considered that the study and deepening of this fundamental theme of Eastern theology are of real use for understanding this great mystery of inner love. I will seek to present in the pages of this work of theological attestation the intra-trinitarian works and reports of the Trinitarian Persons, also their unity in the divine being.

The Church is the Body of Christ offered to us, through the mediation of the Most Holy Spirit in time and space, it is the place where the Holy Trinity acts directly and is always present. The communion of love between the members of the Church has its inexhaustible source in the mystery of love and life of communion above nature, which exists in the bosom of the Holy Trinity.¹

The teaching of the Holy Trinity is for the Orthodox Church "the immutable foundation of all religious thought, of all piety, of all spiritual life, of all experience".² We will not find the foundation employing speculations that can be dangerous and precipitous. The main foundation of the Church must be sought in the mystery of the common life of divine persons, we can understand it only if we look carefully at the trinitarian relationship, the Holy Trinity being a model of the relationship between people in the Church, the Holy Trinity having the power to bind and deepen these relationships.

When choosing the present theme, I considered a good understanding of the theology of the icon and its necessity in the Orthodox Church to be of particular importance. Therefore,

¹ Magistrate Dumitru Gh. Radu, Orthodox and Catholic Teaching about the Church, in "Orthodoxy", year VII (1954) no. 4, p. 537.

² Ibidem, p. 538.

at the proposal of Father Professor, I chose this theme taking into account the special importance of painting the face of the Holy Trinity in the icon.

1. The icon and its importance in Church Tradition

1.1. Icon painting in the Orthodox Church

The Incarnation of Christ the Savior is the basic foundation of the icon. "The icon is an expression of the dogma of the incarnation that it reveals and develops. God, being formless, cannot be painted, but the moment He became man, just like us, we can paint His icon". "When you see that the bodiless One became man for you, then you will make the icon of His human image." When we look at the image of our Lord painted in icons, we see in this image also the other hypostases of God the Son, God the Word and God the Man. "But now because God appeared in the flesh because he dwelt among men, I make the icon of the visible face of God."³ Saint John Damascene affirms that what is corporeal can be represented in an icon, God being the first person to make icons, the Son being the natural icon of the Father (Col. 1, 15). Man himself is made in His image (Genesis 1, 26). The same saint says that this cult of icons does not go to the icon, but to the one who is represented in the icon, as Saint Basil the Great also says: "The honor brought to the icon goes to the one depicted on the icon."⁴

Saint Nichifor the Confessor expresses very beautifully the fact that the icon is superior to the word, it is superior to the sermon, because, in the sermon the speaker intervenes between the listener and the divine reality, while contemplating the icon, the believer has direct access to the divine reality without an intermediary. "Patriarch Nichifor the Confessor, therefore, considered the icon as old as the preaching of the Gospel and as an aid to it."⁵

"Through the icon, we testify to the eternal persistence of the human face, closest to us and in dialogue with us of the supreme Subject, the model and foundation of our subjects; we manifest the feeling of the power we receive to respond as subjects, from the divine Subject who became a human subject and who remained in dialogue with us for eternity. And we receive this power because He remains as a subject or as a human face."⁶

Saint Theodore the Studite shows that: "Although Christ was not a simple man, he can be depicted in the icon".⁷ Our Lord Jesus Christ differs from other people by features, character, name, and many other characteristics, he has a series of personal attributes that help the iconographer in painting His image. Saint Theodore does not state that the icon would be similar in being to the prototype, or of an equal, identical being, as the iconoclasts understood. The relationship that exists between the icon and the prototype is similar. The savior Christ became a real Man, thus, He appropriated the quality of any human being to be a prototype for his icon.⁸ He is a true Man and true God, in His icon we can know that He is God.

The veneration of the icon is relative, for the veneration of the icon passes to the prototype. This passage or ascent of honor from the icon to the prototype shows that the prototype is a separate reality from the icon, but concerning the icon, "We worship, relatively

³ Leonid Uspensky, *Icon Theology in the Orthodox Church*, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p.95.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 96

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

⁶ Saint Teodor Studitul, *Treatises against the Economists*, Deisis Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 1994, p. 53.

⁷ Saint Teodor Studitul, *Treatises against the Economists*, Deisis Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 1994, p. 55.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

to the icon, because the adoration goes only to Christ, the icon participating in some meaning to the archetype.⁹

Speaking about the identity between the cult given to the icon and that given to the prototype, Saint Theodore the Studite says: "We do not venerate the matter of the icon, but the figure of the prototype that it shows, the matter of the icon remaining without veneration. For it does not matter that we honor, but the prototype, along with its figure. So the reverence given to the icon is the same that goes to the prototype, as well as the likeness is the same. So it is not a question of another respect when we venerate an icon, but of the same respect we give to the prototype".¹⁰

Saint Theodore the Studite sees in the denial of the holy icons, the denial of the entire work of salvation of the Savior Christ, the denial of the truth of His passion, death, and resurrection. All His bodily attributes are denied by denying Christ the Savior the possibility of being depicted in the icon. After the resurrection, He kept the attributes of human nature. Otherwise, he would no longer have been commanded to be touched, to show that he is a real man, of flesh and blood." they had as their goal, not a legal reconciliation of man with God, but an eternal deification of the whole man, including the body".¹¹

"Christ all the more is the prototype of his icon and His icon is destined to be everywhere, since He is not only a true personal man, in the maximum degree, therefore unique and completely distinct from the others, but also God is shown as a man".¹²

The canons of the Orthodox Church established that: "The honor given to the icon passes to its prototype and the one who worships the icon, worships the person painted on it". The canons that determine the veneration of icons are Canon 21 of the Synod of Gangra from the year 340, Canon 82 Trullan, from the year 692, Canon 100 Trullan, from the year 692, Canons 1 and 7 of the VII Ecumenical Synod from the year 787, and Canon 3 of The Council of Constantinople, from the years 869-870.

1.2. The spiritual face of the Byzantine Icon

Nowadays, a so-called image culture has been formed, but without people being initiated into a reading of the image. In addition to the already traditional dispute between the different Protestant cults, on the one hand, and the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, on the other, opinions began to appear according to which people lost the true meaning of venerating icons and that in this way they left prey to unconscious idolatry. This opinion is not completely devoid of truth, because experience shows that people have lost the true meaning of honoring icons, this devotion sometimes becoming only the effect of a tradition inherited from generation to generation, but whose theme has been forgotten. Therefore, there is a need for a re-awareness of the foundations of icon veneration, or, better said, of the necessity of icon veneration.

The icon represents "any sacred Christian image, representing Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, saints or religious scenes, made in different techniques and intended for worship".¹³ Leonid Uspensky, in his work *Theology of the Icon in the Orthodox Church*, published in Romanian by Anastasia Publishing House in 1994, defines the icon in a broader sense, calling

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

¹¹ **Rene Broscăreanu**, Dogmatic aspects of the iconoclastic dispute, in rev. "Theological Studies", (1987), no. 6, p. 34.

¹² *Ibidem*, p.35.

¹³ **Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Popescu**, *Jesus Christ Pantocrator*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest 2005, p. 405.

it "an emblematic summary of Christian anthropology, the sensitive theme of Christological dogma, the crossroads between visible and invisible, epiphanic mirror, support of thaumaturgic effects, a vehicle of grace and corridor of prayerful contemplation."¹⁴

The first aspect is that the face painted in the icon is a likeness, a model, or an imprint of someone. She cannot fully resemble the original, as she is unable to articulate words, think or feel anything. Therefore, the icons should never be confused with what they represent, not even in the moments when they are the instruments of some thaumaturgical phenomena.¹⁵ That is why we do not honor the wood or the canvas on which the icon is painted, but through the icon, we honor what it represents. Consequently, one cannot speak of idolatry.

Another aspect often lost sight of is that of worship and what it represents. Throughout church history, there have been periods of denial of icons, and often these periods of heresy started from a wrong understanding of the aspect mentioned before. We venerate the Mother of God, we venerate the saints and sacred objects. By worshiping them we worship the God who works through them. Therefore, their veneration is closely related to the worship of God. Therefore, the worship of God is a sine qua non-condition of the veneration of icons. Idolatry, therefore, appears only when it is worship without adoration. Thus, if the veneration of icons is doubled by an authentic faith, this is not an opposition to the second commandment of the Decalogue.

Therefore, the icon must be seen as Word and Image. The Icon is a Word-Image and has a historical and theological path that leads to a harmonious Word-Image unity. The icon understands the word of God as an image. It is required by man to better understand the revelation.¹⁶ It can also be seen as a communication of a message. An image becomes an element of a meeting between Christians, a kind of symbol in which they recognize each other. At the same time, the icon is the communication of spiritual and theological content that most often refers to the dead and risen Jesus Christ. In this sense, Tomas Spidlik states: "Therefore, the icon is essentially a sacramental vision of the world, the vision of how nature offers itself to become the place of salvation. It is therefore an initiation into an understanding - not abstract, but full - of the reality of human history in God and God's in history".¹⁷

1.3. Grounds for honoring the holy icons in the Holy Scriptures and the tradition of the Church

Holy Scripture proved that God himself permitted icons. He gave birth to His Son, who, according to the word of Scripture, is the natural icon of the Father, "is the image of the invisible God." God made man in "His image and likeness". God is the first who made icons, as St. John Damascene says.

The Old Law shows that the representation of some religious characters or symbols was allowed, so God commands Moses to make the faces of the two cherubim that guarded the Tabernacle of the Testimony and the brass snake as a sign of deliverance in the wilderness.¹⁸ Later, King Solomon decorates the temple in Jerusalem.

¹⁴ Leonid Uspensky, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁵ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Popescu, op. cit., p. 405.

¹⁶ Tomas Spidlik, Marco Ivan Rupnik, Faith and icon, Ed. Dacia, Bucharest 2002, pp. 41-42

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 43

¹⁸ Bishop Silvestru de Canev, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, vol. V, Ed. Credința Strămoșească, (Multiprint Iași Typography), 2001, p. 172.

In the New Testament, communication was done in word and face. For the unseen One became seen with their bodily eyes, which in the Old Testament was only foreshadowed in symbols.

The teaching on the veneration of icons established at the Seventh Ecumenical Council remained normative for the councils and theologians who later dealt with this issue. The veneration of icons cannot be confused with the honor we give to God: we honor God by adoration, and the saints, icons, and their relics by veneration.

In the main prayer in the Order for the blessing and sanctification of the icon of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Molitfelnic, it is specified: "I put this icon before Your glory, not deifying it, but knowing that the honor of the icon goes to the one who painted it".¹⁹

The churches, chapels, and houses of the Orthodox Christians are decorated with icons. They are testimonies of the faith and piety of Christians, the icons have been preserved with sanctity from ancient times to the present day, thus proving the steadfastness of the Church in the true faith.²⁰

The icons in which the Savior is represented are closely related to those depicting the Mother of God. The painting of the Mother of God in icons in the Orthodox Church is done in a form that leads the believer to the great mystery that was accomplished through Her - that is, to the incarnation of the Son of God.

The teaching of our Orthodox Church is clear in the formation of the type of iconography of Saints and martyrs, who lived the "new life in Christ" and by fighting won in this life "the indestructible crown of the heavenly life". Every saint has become for the Christian a model of rebirth in Christ. Their figures are not depicted in icons as material, as they are before grace, but as some that express holiness, that is, as some that have glory in heaven.

The victory of restoring the veneration of the holy icons, along with the other teachings of the Holy Church, is celebrated every year by all the Orthodox Churches on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the first Sunday of the Holy Easter Lent.

The iconography of the Orthodox Church is religious art, through which the word of God is visibly expressed. It can reproduce events from the history of our salvation, the whole painting in the Church being dominated by the light of the resurrection. The content of the Orthodox painting represents a new heaven and earth, namely that of the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Iconography is a spiritual, liturgical, and theological art, it shares deep themes with people. Because icon painting is a liturgical art, holy icons have a role in the good understanding and purpose of divine worship. The holy icons, apart from the presentation of the secret ones, also depict other scenes from the life of the Savior, the Mother of God, and the Saints. The scenes painted in the icons urge us to follow the example of these servants of true faith. In addition, the holy icons focusing on some main themes such as the scene of the Nativity, the Passion, and the Resurrection, which are not missing from any painted church, establish the essential objective of divine worship. New iconographic themes related to the cult of the Mother of God enriched the Christian churches along the way.

The icon is inspired by the worship of the Church and thus forms a homogeneous whole, completing itself on the souls of the faithful. It is a testimony of God's descent into man and of man's effort to rise to God. That is why icons must make perceptible through this art the presence of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p.173.

²⁰ **Rev. Pof. Dr. Isidor Todoran, Archid. Prof. Dr. Ioan Zăgrean**, Dogmatic Theology, Renaissance Ed. 2000, p. 265.

2. Representation of the Holy Trinity in Iconography

2.1. The teaching of the Church about the Holy Trinity

The life of the Holy Trinity is woven harmoniously into that of the Church, the result of the communion and love between the persons of the Holy Trinity is the atmosphere of love that pours over people. The Orthodox faith bases its religious teachings on the Bible, which it considers inspired by God. Although the God of the Bible has revealed himself as a personal God, the Bible does not contain any treatise on God, because the God of the Bible escapes any possibility of human investigation.²¹

The Trinity is one of the mysteries hidden in God, the persons of the Holy Trinity cannot be known unless they are revealed from above. The intimacy of God's being as the Holy Trinity constitutes a mystery inaccessible to reason left to its own devices and even to the faith of Israel before the incarnation of the Son of God and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Although they share the same Being, the divine persons also have specific peculiarities. The three Persons are three concrete, rational, living existences, irreducible and absolute alterities, there are three different and special ways in which the three Persons hypostasize their common nature.

Thus, the Father hypostasizes all the divine Nature in a way proper to Him, as Father, being: unborn, unborn, begets the Son and simultaneously (ontologically) gives birth to the Holy Spirit. The Son hypostasizes the divine Nature in His way, as a Son born of the Father, He is thus: begotten, unborn, does not beget, and begets no one. The Holy Spirit hypostasizes the divine Nature in His way, as a Spirit born from the Father, so it is: unborn, born, does not beget and does not beget anyone, but is born simultaneously with the birth of the Son.

2.2. Holy Trinity in iconography

In the iconographic register, the Orthodox Church preferred the icon of the Holy Trinity which represents the biblical scene of the appearance of the three Persons in front of our ancestor Abraham near the oak of Mamvri (Genesis 18). To show that they come from the heavenly world, they are described as angels with wings. The icon, based on a concrete historical event, depicts the first appearance of the Triune God to man, signifying the beginning of the promise of salvation.

The iconography and divine service connect the beginning of this promise with its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost when we are given the final revelation regarding the Holy Trinity. In other words, the icon of the Holy Trinity unites, so to speak, the beginning of the Church of the Old Testament with the foundation of the Church of the New Testament. From ancient times, the Holy Trinity was depicted as the historical biblical scene, with angels sitting at the table under the oak tree. Abraham and Sarah serve him, their house can be seen in the back. A servant stabbing a calf often appears in the close-up.²²

Many Fathers of the Church understood the visit of the three Persons to Abraham either as a showing, however indirect, of the entire Trinity or as the appearance of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, accompanied by two angels. "Blessed Abraham saw the Trinity as much as a man can and honored it as a friend: Saint Abraham receives the Ancient of Days, One in three Faces" (Canon of the Sunday of the Holy Ancestors; Canon of the Service of the Holy Fathers, Canticle 1).²³

²¹ Pr. Assist. Alexandru I. Stan, Holy Trinity in the Church, in "Orthodoxy", Year XXXVI, No. 3, July 1984, p. 14.

²² Paul Evdokimov, The art of the icon a theology of beauty, Meridian Publishing House, 1993, p. 32.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

According to the teaching of the Church and the interpretation of the Holy Fathers, the angels are sometimes grouped according to the isocephalic principle, that is, they sit at the table next to each other, equal in rank, thus showing the equality of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, who remain, at the same time, distinct. Moreover, their equality is sometimes highlighted by the identity of the color of the angels' garments and their attributes. In other situations, the composition is pyramidal, emphasizing the central angel.

For many centuries, the representation of the three biblical Persons in the form of angels was the only acceptable representation of the Holy Trinity; it is still preserved in the Orthodox Church, as the one that best suits its teaching - although the representation of God - the Father as an old man, with His Son - Christ in his lap and the Holy Spirit as a dove either between them or on a disc held of the Savior, bears the title "Paternity" (this representation transposes the Filioque doctrine in pictorial form), it is a representation of the Trinity, because it tries to depict the three divine Persons.²⁴ The earliest representation of this kind known to us is an illustration of the writings of St. John the Ladder from an early 11th-century Greek manuscript (now in the Vatican Library).

In Russian iconography, it served as the starting point for those distortions that followed under the influence of the West. This representation was forbidden by the Great Synod of Moscow, from the year 1667, in the following terms: "To represent in icons God-Savaot (that is, the Father), with a white beard, with His only Son in his lap and with a dove between Well, it is extremely absurd and unseemly, because no one has seen God the Father. Because the Father has no body and not in the body the Son was born of the Father before eternity; David the Prophet says: "From the womb, before I have begotten You" (Ps. 109, 3) - but this birth is not in the body, but is beyond understanding and expression. And Christ Himself says in the Holy Scripture: "No one knows the Father except The son".²⁵

"The pre-eternal birth of the Only-Begotten Son from the Father must be understood with the mind, but it must not and cannot be represented in icons" (Documents of the Moscow Synod, 1666-1667, Moscow, 1893. About icon painters and Lord Savaot).²⁶

Both the iconography of this representation, borrowed from the iconography of the Theotokos, and the title "Paternity" show it as an attempt to illustrate the birth, from eternity, from the Father, alongside the human birth from the Mother. But this birth beyond understanding is represented as the birth, in the bosom of the Father (which cannot be described) of the Child, Who was born with a body from His Mother, which introduces an anthropomorphic element into the Holy Trinity.

The icon of the Holy Trinity that fully corresponds to the teaching of the Church, both in content and in its artistic expression, is Rubliov's Trinity, the most important of the iconographic creations painted by him for the monastery of the Holy Trinity and Saint Sergius, probably between 1408 and 1425; now in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.²⁷

Like other older icons of the Holy Trinity, it depicts three angels, but the circumstances of their appearance are not described. The composition depicts Abraham's house, the oak, and a mountain, but Abraham and Sarah are missing. Without abolishing the historical aspect of the

²⁴ **Constantine Cavarnos**, *Byzantine Iconography Guide*, translated from English by Anca Popescu, Sofia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, p. 71.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

²⁷ **Paul Evdokimov**, *The art of the icon a theology of beauty*, Meridian Publishing House, 1993, p. 41.

event, St. Andrew reduces it to a minimum, because the main meaning does not lie in the biblical event, but in its dogmatic meaning.

The icon also differs from others by its basic compositional structure - a circle. Passing through the top of the halo of the central Angel and partially cutting the bottom of the pedestals, the circle embraces all three figures, very vaguely exceeding their outlines.

This composition of the Holy Trinity has existed for a long time, but only in panaghi or small round icons and on the bottom of holy vessels, where the composition was dictated by the shape of the object and the lack of space, not by the dogmatic conception.

Placing the figures of the Angels in a circle, Saint Andrew united them in one smooth and flowing movement, following the line of the circle. In this way, the central Angel, although higher than the others, does not overwhelm them, nor dominate them. The aureole of the inclined head, away from the vertical axis of the circle, and the feet placed on the other side, emphasize this even more this movement, in which both the oak and the mountain enter.

At the same time, the inclination of the halo and the legs, in opposite directions, restores the balance of the composition, and the movement stops in the monumental immobility of the Angel on the left and the house of Abraham above Him. And yet, "everywhere we look, we see echoes of the main circular harmony, corresponding to the outline, forms born from other forms or reflected as in a mirror, lines leading beyond the outline of the circle or interwoven in its center - a symphony rich in shapes, sizes, lines, and colors, not to be expressed in words, but which delights the eye."²⁸

The icon of Saint Andrew has action, expressed in gestures, communion, expressed in the bowing of the heads and the position of the figures, and silence, unwavering peace. This inner life, uniting the three figures enclosed in a circle and communicating outside, discovers all the inexhaustible depth of the icon. It is as if an echo of the words of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, according to whose interpretation "the circular movement signifies the fact that God, remaining identical with Himself, clothed in a synthesis the intermediate parts and the extremes, which are, at the same time, both contained and the what they contain, and that He calls to Himself all that have moved away from Him".

If the angle of the heads and bodies of the two Angels bent towards the one in the middle connects them, the gestures of their hands go towards the eucharistic chalice, containing the head of a sacrificial animal, which sits on a white table like an altar. Symbolizing the voluntary sacrifice of the Son of God, he attracts to himself the gestures of the Angels, indicating the unity of will and work of the Holy Trinity, Who made a covenant with Abraham.²⁹

The almost identical faces and silhouettes of the Angels emphasize the unique nature of the three divine Persons and also show that this icon in no way wants to individualize each Person of the Holy Trinity. Like other older icons, this is not an "ad intra" representation of the Holy Trinity, that is, of the three Persons of the Godhead, because the Godhead, in its essence, cannot be represented. It remains the same historical scene (although the historical aspect is reduced to a minimum), which symbolically reveals the unity and trinity of the Godhead, discovering Their working together in the world, the divine Economy. Therefore, despite the similarity of the Angels, they are not devoid of individuality, the character of each one being reproduced by His work in the world.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

The angels are grouped in the icon in the order of the Trinitarian Persons in the Symbol of Faith, from left to right: I believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (The grouping of Angels sometimes led to an inappropriate definition, to a total distortion.

Thus, before Rubliov and after him, the Angel in the middle, which seems to have always been understood by icon painters as the second Person, was often singularized, with a cruciform nimbus, with the inscription "Jesus Christ" and with a scroll in hand instead of staff. Perhaps as a reaction to these distortions, and in Russia, especially as a reaction against the heresy of the Judaizers, who denied the orthodox teaching about the Holy Trinity, distortions of a different type appeared, although less often: not one, but all three Angels were represented with nimbus crusader.

Although the singularization of the central Angel has a certain basis in the interpretations of the Holy Fathers mentioned above, it is not correct to introduce it into the representation, because this means that the name of the God-Man is given to a face that is not His direct and concrete representation. "When the Word became flesh, he received the name of Jesus Christ," says Saint John Damascene.³⁰

Concerning the crucifix nimbus, in this case, the other Persons of the Holy Trinity are granted the passionate appropriation of the Lord, thus attributing to them a virtual participation in the economy proper to the second Person.

The problem of the inscription and the crusader nimbus was taken up by Tsar Ivan the Terrible and discussed at the Synod of 1551 in Moscow, called the Synod of the Hundred Heads. In response, the Synod decided that this image should be painted according to the tradition of the old icon painters and in the manner of Andrei Rubliov, i.e. without the crusader nimbus, and that it should be called the "Holy Trinity" and that nothing should be made from someone's imagination".³¹

The indescribability of the First Person, to whom even the Creed refers in a restrained way, corresponds to the sober and undefined shade of the garment of the Angel on the left (a pale pink cloak, with light shades of brown and blue-green).

Regarding the Second Person, we have richer testimonies compared to the others and which go up to the exact historical indication (from the time of Pontius Pilate); to this corresponds the precision and clarity of the colors of the central Angel, whose garment has the usual colors of the Son of God incarnate (a scarlet chiton and a blue mantle).

Finally, the main color of the third Angel is green - the color of the mantle - which, according to the interpretation of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, signifies "youth, the fullness of powers". It specifically indicates the properties of the third Person of the Holy Trinity, Who renews and gives life to all.

The subtly conceived harmony and chromatic ratio found in Rubliov's icon constitute one of its main attractions. The amethyst blossom of the middle Angel's mantle is of extraordinary intensity and purity, combined with the wings of the color of ripe corn, and is especially powerful. The clear colors of the middle Angel contrast with the soft shades of the other two; but even with them, bright blue areas shine here and there, like precious stones.

Through the chromatic unity of the three figures, Rubliov seems to indicate the unique nature of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity and at the same time gives the whole icon a calm and lucid cheerfulness. Thus, its chromatic harmony becomes the echo of the same life that fills

³⁰ **Christoph Schonborn**, *Icon of Christ. A theological introduction*, translated by Prof. Dr. Vasile Răducă, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest 2011, p. 112.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

its faces, shapes, and lines. "Here we find, at the same time, the emphasis on the center, the color contrasts, a balance of the parts, its completion in shades, and gradual transitions that turn the eye from the rich coloring to golden light (the background). And, above all, the glow of pure blue, clear as the cloudless sky."

By its inexhaustible content, the harmonious balance of the composition, the majestic, calm figures of the Angels, as well as by its light, cheerful, summer colors, this icon could only be the creation of a man who extinguished in his soul all confusion and doubt and was enlightened with the light of the knowledge of God.

The icon of Saint Andrew remains to this day a classic example of the iconography of the Holy Trinity. Tradition preserves its basic colors and individual details of drawing and composition.

Another remarkable icon of the Holy Trinity is a replica of Rubliov's icon. It was in the Russian Museum in Leningrad and is supposed to have been painted no later than the end of the 15th century. Here we find the same lines and positions of the Angels, although they are not grouped in a circle, but in an almost straight line, with the central figure only slightly highlighted. The figures, practically without shoulders, are even more effeminate than in the original.³²

The composition is more static, and the figures of the Angels are united by tone rather than movement. The basic colors of the clothes are preserved, but they are more subdued and uniform. The general tone of the icon is not bright and clear as in Rubliov, but restrained and warm. Due to the strong treatment of the background, the whole scene is brought closer to the ground, and the icon, revealed to Saint Andrew in its ineffable majesty, is here closer and more intimate.

Conclusions

The Church's relationship with God the Father, in the Christian Church intensely activates all the persons of the Holy Trinity. Being God, the Father of all, who is over all and through all and in us all" (Ephesians 4:6), means that we are all His children. In the Father we have our common origin because, from God, all parental names in heaven and on earth are derived" (Ephesians 3:15). God cares equally for all, enveloping us all with His paternal love, as His children.

Being from God's family, being sons of the same Father, and having the same faith, here is the bond that unites Christians in close unity. God looks at us and treats us all with kindness full of equity. He is present, overall" through His almighty sovereignty, He is, in all" through the extension of His providence. He is in all of us" through His grace, through His love for us (Ephesians 4:6).³³

The church is the place where and through which God wants to save the faithful by sending His Son and the Holy Spirit to help them. Thus the plan of our salvation was born from eternity with God, but it was realized through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. In Christ, God the Father, just as He chose us, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him, preordained us, in His love, to adopt in Him, through Jesus Christ, according to the good judgment of His will" (Ephesians 1, 4-5).

This plan was to be completed through the Holy Spirit, because we, the believers, through the Son, have proximity to the Father in a Spirit" (Ephesians 2, 18). Practically,

³² Paul Evdokimov, *The art of the icon – a theology of beauty*, Meridian Publishing House, 1993, p.45.

³³ *Ibidem*.

salvation continues to be realized through the Church, which groups all Christians in its perfect unity (cf. Ephesians 3, 21). God the Father, for the love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ, because we were dead in sins, and raised us with him, so that we may sit with him in heaven" (Cf. Ephesians 2:4-6).

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