



Liturgia Sacra 23 (2017), nr 2, s. 499–511
DOI: 10.25167/LitS/23(2017)2/499–511

REV. IONIȚĂ APOSTOLACHE
Craiova, UCv

SOME IMPORTANT NOTES ON THE ORTHODOX THEOLOGY OF ICON

In the teachings of the Orthodox Church, the idea that “the icon bears the same importance as the Holy Scripture and the Holy Cross as one of those forms of God’s revelation and knowledge where the divine and human will and work unite” is clearly emphasized. The teaching of the Church is taught and expressed most purely through the holy icons “life in grace of our Sacred Tradition”¹. It has been inherited from ancient times the tradition that, in this sacred relationship between man and God, the Church is to cherish these wonders of our Orthodox creed. The icons, indeed, become windows to heaven and open doors to salvation through *oikonomia*, being based on the divine Incarnation of our Saviour Jesus Christ: “who for us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens and was incarnate of The Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and He became man”².

1. Man and the world: icons of the divine creation

In order to understand in what way we are to support and argue for the theology of the holy icons, we should first know the teaching of the Old Testament. At the

¹ L. USPENSKY, V. LOSSKY, *The meaning of icons*, trans. A. Popescu, Bucharest 2007², p. 41.

² Art. II, The Orthodox Creed.

beginning God seals His creation with His own image. By the power of His word Creator separates light from darkness (Gen. 1:3), waters from dry land (verse 6); He makes the grass and the fruitful trees grow (v. 11), raises “lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, days and years” (verse 14), made the creatures from the sea and the land, according to their purpose and “kinds” (verse 25). Finally, the Life-bearer creates man according to the “icon of His own image”:

Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground! (Gen 1,26).

The icon created by the divine hand — man, bears in his being the *image of the Trinity*, being ordained for a life of communion, and not for autonomy or bondage to the world. Hence, his relation to the nature, to the place given to him, is the honour for which he had been ordained. Due to his condition as *image*” or *icon*, man’s duty was to strengthen the bond ceaselessly between God and the world as connection between the immanent and transcendent³

During the transgression process from *prototype to image* man remains the most accurate mirror of God in His creation. According to the Law of the Old Testament, *Yahve Elohim* (or “He who is”)⁴ was beyond any kind of material representation. However, in the agreement of God’s revelation, He reveals Himself and acts in His creation in a very personal way. Thus, the Holy Scripture states about “the image” and “face of God” that the Holy Fathers identify with the “*Only Begotten Son*”, “*who is in the bosom of the Father*” (John 1,18). Therefore, the Father, “Whom no man has seen at any time” (John 1,18) “bears in His Son a face which He turns to the world, He reveals Himself. He has done this since the beginning of creation, but through the Incarnation of the Only Begotten, this face has become visible to us. Therefore the Incarnate One says about Himself: “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 1,14). The Incarnate Word, being eternally “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (cf. Hbr. 1,3), “is therefore, as Person, the only true Icon or Image of the Invisible God (Col. 1,15), that face of God whose mere sight brings salvation to man (cf. Ps 79,4)⁵

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul clearly explains that “let light shine out of darkness — made his light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ” (cf. 2 Cor. 4,5-6). Therefore, the glory of God in the world does not require any evidence. Thus, Paul Evdokimov, the great theologian and thinker of the Russian exile, invokes the presence of God in the

³ As the image of God in the Trinity, man was not made to defile nature, or to become the servant of nature, but to live in communion with God and all creation through the power of divine grace”; D. POPESCU, *Jesus Christ Pantocrator*, Bucharest 2005, p. 169.

⁴ Ex. 3,14.

⁵ G. BUNGE, *The Rublev Trinity: The Icon of the Trinity by the monk-painter Andrei Rublev*”, trans. Ioan I. Ica jr., Sibiu 2016², p. 23–24.

world as gracious shine and work, as providence and eternal *oikonomia* understood as “the iconographic argument of the Divine Truth”

The intelligible content of the icons, the author states, is dogmatic, and hence, a work of art icon is not beautiful, but its truth is. An icon can never be «beautiful»; its beauty requires spiritual sophistication in order to be considered as such⁶

Paul Evdokimov is also the author who founding his approach on the Holy Scripture, writes about light aureoles around the iconographic images. Thus, he sheds light on the delicate issue about the difference between “the original light” (as cosmic order, set by the Heavenly Father’s Word: “Be Light!”)⁷ and “the light that shines in darkness” (as existential reality and gracious presence of God in man’s life, even after the fall). Both in the Old and New Testaments, these metamorphoses of human existence are revealed in light of the knowledge of the divine. “Your light shall rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday” (Is. 58,10). “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light” (Mt 6,22). Jesus Christ, the Lord, who is the Light of the world, makes the perfect “to broaden their knowledge of the divine ones, not only by the word (Logos), but also by the light of the word (the Holy Spirit) mysteriously...”

During our spiritual research we become aware that only in the Person of Christ, the Saviour, “the Alpha and the Omega ... the Beginning and the End” (cf. Rev. 1,8), the circular reality of the divine created icon is unequally and fully revealed. “The circle of revelation comprises the differentiation and, at the same time, the perfect identity of all its elements. The first word of the Bible: “Let it be light!” is also, the last one: “Let it be beauty!”. Man can become a living doxology, the glory to the One who has showed us the Light. «One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple» (Ps 27:4). His creation as Spirit of Beauty is a poetry without the contemplation of Divine Beauty, encompassing eternity”⁸.

2. The Icon of Transfiguration — an interpretation of the Divine Grace

Beginning from the points describing above, we will focus our attention on the spiritual meanings derived from the interpretation of the Icon of the Lord’s Trans-

⁶ P. EVDOKIMOV, *Orthodoxy*, trans. I.I. Popa, Bucharest 1996, p. 235.

⁷ The Russian theologian illustrates the fact that this commandment refers in principle to the Revelation/Discovery. Moreover, they are like a call of the Revelator, the Holy Spirit. “The Father utters His word, and the Holy Spirit acts it. He is the Light of the Word. It reveals God as absolute You and gives birth to the one who listens to and contemplates it, the second light out of the Light and set as his other ego and as a mirror in the light – revelation – communion”; P. EVDOKIMOV, *The Art of the Icon A theology of beauty*, trans. G. Moga, P. Moga, Bucharest 1992, p. 14.

⁸ P. EVDOKIMOV, *The Art of the Icon*, p. 15.

figuration. From the biblical point of view, the event itself⁹ brings clarification by the fact that the “light” which the Apostles saw was nothing else than “the Godhead (*théosis*)”, “the shine of the divine nature,” “the everlasting glory of the Son of God” This is the reason for which the Holy Fathers and theologians of the Church have changed this divine reality into “one of their personal particular concerns, setting out the orthodox definition of grace, based on the dogmatic difference between the inaccessible essence and God’s transmittable energy”¹⁰. According to St. Gregory Palamas, this divine event confirms the fact that “God is called light, not because of His nature, but because of His energy”¹¹ The Tabor’s light is in the opinion of the Father “beyond time and space, and inaccessible to the senses, even though it was contemplated by the bodily eyes ... but due to a change of their senses the disciples of the Lord passed from flesh to Spirit”¹². In turn St. John of Damascus sees in this gracious shine of the Tabor’s light the icon of the divine image restored in man through the Person of Christ the Saviour:

The Merciful One has made us partakers of a second communion, more positive and wonderful. For His dwelling in the height of his own divinity, becomes a partaker of the lowest, redeeming man divinely, so that the Archetype may unite with His own icon, so that today to show us by itself (the icon) natural beauty. And its image shines exactly like the sun — for it is identified by hypostasis, through the incorporeal light, since He is the Sun of righteousness — and His clothes as snow white; For it is glorified (the body) by encompassment and not by union, but by relation, and not by hypostatic union. Adumbrating the glory of the Spirit, he painted a cloud of light. For thus, as the divine Apostle said (cf. 1 Cor 10,1), the icon of water sends to the sea, and that of the cloud to (the icon of) the Spirit. Everything is lightened and over-shone for those who can receive the light, who do not have their soul stained with the impurity of consciousness¹³

The Icon of the Transfiguration is the dearest one to the *hesychasm*. The theology, deep inside, “tries to recreate the mysterious experience of the uncreated light experienced by the three Apostles on Mount Tabor” The classical representation, inherited from the Byzantine tradition, depicts Christ the Saviour in the middle of the image, clothed in light garments. He offers blessings with His right hand whilst in His left one He holds a “folded scroll” The colours around our Lord are different shades of emerald green, obviously suggesting, “the *apophatism* of divine knowledge illustrated by Dionysius the Areopagite”¹⁴. This Father interprets the Lord’s Transfiguration as a genuine influence of the process of knowing God mysteriously. For this man must be worthy of the cleansing work of the divine grace.

⁹ In Mk. 17,1-9 and Lk. 9,27-36, where the testimonies of the Holy Apostles Peter, John, and Jacob are illustrated; the Apostles became the eyewitnesses of this “power and coming of our Lord of his majesty” (cf. 2 Pt. 1,16–18).

¹⁰ L. USPENSKY, V. LOSSKY, *The meaning of icons*, p. 221–222.

¹¹ *Against Achindin*, VI, 9, in: PG 150, col. 823.

¹² IDEM, *Homily 34*, PG 151, col. 249.

¹³ JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *Speech at the royal feast, the feast of Virgin Mary and the Saints*, trans. G. Mandrila, L. Mandrila, Bucharest 2010, p. 77–78.

¹⁴ C.E. CERCEL, *Iconostasis and the Eucharist. The role of the iconostasis in the Orthodox Church*, Craiova 2015, p. 207.

Then, said Dionysius, when we shall become immortal and everlasting, reaching happiness, when we shall become like Christ (*christoeidous*), we shall be always with the Lord, according to the word of the Scripture, enjoying His evident theophany through purest contemplations, lightened by His bright rays like the disciples when at His divine Transfiguration; at the same time, through our incomprehensible and incorporeal mind, we shall take part in its intelligible enlightenment and also in the unity that is beyond mind, in the mystical and happy delight of those over shining rays in a similar state to that of the heavenly spirits. For as the Word of Truth says, being the sons of the Resurrection, we shall be like the angels and sons of God¹⁵.

The one who has been affected by these feelings, Dionysius says, passes from the visible things to the “godly reality of their archetypes”¹⁶.

Furthermore, looking at the icon of the Transfiguration of the Lord we distinguish two parts: three characters in the upper part and three more in the lower one.

The attitude of the two groups is significantly different. On the top of the mountain, Moses and Elijah stand next to Jesus Christ each by His side; they are within the light circle and participate in the Glory of God in complete harmony with Him, whilst the Apostles, who are in the lower part of the icon, at the foot of the mountain, are overwhelmed and their attitude expresses disorder and chaos. This contrast reminds once more of the fact that man cannot see God with his fleshly eyes.

Moses and Elijah, together with the prophet Isaiah, are the only people who, after the fall of the proto-parents, have been granted the permission to see God¹⁷ Moreover, they were at that moment under the mystical blessing of the light of the divine grace. Their eyes saw from another world the Sun of Righteousness, each of them, thus, becoming the prototype of accomplished promises that God once made to His chosen people.

Moses and Elijah worship Jesus. Moses represents the Law, and Elijah comes on behalf of the prophets to testify together with them to the divinity of Christ, who is “the accomplishment of the law and prophecies”

On the other hand, the eyes of the Apostles are blinded by the light and shine of the divine grace. However,

at the sight of Christ in glory, they are full of joy and want to stop this moment. Peter asks to stay forever on the mountain, and therefore he proposes to build three huts, three tents here in order to be worthy of the sight of God. He did not know what he was saying, because it was too early, and they were not yet prepared for eternity. They had to pass together with Christ through death in order to see Him again in glory after the Resurrection¹⁸.

The icon of the Transfiguration of the Lord illustrates the fact that the eschatological value of the icon results from the gracious synergy it shares. Its light is

¹⁵ *Div. nom.*, I, 4; col. 592.

¹⁶ DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *About the rites celebrated in the Holy Synaxis — mystery and contemplation*, trans. Ioan ICA jr, after G. HEI / A.-M. RITTER, *Corpus Dionysiacum II* (PTS 36), Berlin – New York 1991, p. 65–68, 79–94, in: Ioan Ica jr, *From Dionysius the Areopagite to Simeon The New Theologian. Complete series of Byzantine liturgical comments. Studies and texts*, Sibiu 2011, p. 165.

¹⁷ Cf. Ex. 33, 18–23 and 3 Kings 19,9–13.

¹⁸ *Living God. Orthodox Catechism*, trans. I. Nicolae, Alba Iulia 2009, p. 105–106.

never an external one, for being full of the divine grace, it always shines internally. Therefore, it can be said that the iconographer paints with the Tabor light itself. According to the old rules “any monk who is also an iconographer paints his first icon inspired by the subject of the Lord's Transfiguration, so that Jesus Christ «shall shine His light in the soul of the iconographer»” This very subtle aspect is illustrated into a manuscript of the Holy Mountain, from which we learn that the person charged with this ministry must “pray with hot tears, that God enter his soul. He must go to the priest, so that the priest should pray over him and read the Prayer of the Transfiguration”

3. The Seventh Ecumenical Council. Church's victory against iconoclasm

The famous debate against icons or the iconoclast heresy occurred in the 8th and 9th centuries, becoming an essential issue in the times of the Byzantine Emperor Leon III the Isaurian (717–741). From an etymological point of view, the word iconoclasm basically defines the act of “icons' destruction” (from εἰκόν – image, face, icon; κλάσμα – to destroy, to crush). On the other hand, when it comes to describe the fight against icons, the term of iconomachy is used (εἰκόν; μάχη – fight)¹⁹ The historical context is very complex, outlining a stubborn resistance between those who cherished the icons and those who fought against them. Although, there was a synodic decision expressed in order to support the worship of icons and point out their role within the cult (Can. 36 of the Synod of Elvira, 306), Leon the Isaurian clearly and ceaselessly expressed “against the cult of images”. He intended to restore the “true religion” in the Empire, which, through the cult of icons had been blemished and betrayed by idolatry. Self-giving the right to supervise any church issues of any kind, he enforces iconoclasm as official doctrine²⁰

The conflict was certainly conceptual; two groups

could not agree one with the other since they dealt with completely different realities. For the iconoclasts the image, whatever this might have been, could only be a portrait; but any portrait of the divine is unthinkable. Because of this exclusively realistic way of conceiving art, they denied the icon any symbolic nature. They believed strictly in symbols, that is, the real presence of the Symbolized in its symbol (the sacramental perspective), but denied any connection between the prototype and its iconographic image. Thus, the icon no longer belonged to the sacramental but to the profane art²¹

On the other hand, religiously speaking, the iconoclasts accepted only the non-figurative art, without any image or person on the object. For example, the Holy

¹⁹ N. CHIFAR, *The history of Christianity*, vol. I, Sibiu 2007, p. 240.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 425.

²¹ P. EVDOKIMOV, *The Art of the Icon*, p. 20.

Cross was featured without Christ the Saviour based on the idea that, since it represents the instrument of salvation, it becomes “worthy of worship by itself”

Moreover, Evdokimov states, they limited their approach to the principle of identity and referred to the Eucharist. They consider it to be the only proper image of Christ, and this was consubstantial (*homousios*), identical (*tavto*), by nature (*kat ousian*)²².

In order to suppress idolatry, the Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council (787), led by St. John Damascene, first pointed out the fact that the icon bears the name of its portrayed character, not of his nature, and therefore the mystical significance of the icon relates only to its hypostatic presence” Thus, in terms of its practical content, it can be said that the Seventh Ecumenical Council “has laid the basis for the cult of the icon, but not yet for an elaborate doctrine” Answers to already existing questions have been given and clarifications have been brought up based upon firm arguments, which we confess up to the present day. For example, the issue of knowing how God might be confined to a mere image is clarified in the third canon of the Holy Synod, whose answer is also a question: “You, who deny that Christ may be confined, how will you be able to recognize Him in *Parousia*?” Another issue is the one related to the way in which the human nature that the divine Word willingly brought in through the Incarnation can be depicted? To this question, St. Theodore the Studite answers, pointing out the fact that “the human nature of Christ is a constituent species of the genre (*genos*), but it is embodied in a real, distinct being from the others”. In turn, St. John of Damascus illustrates the fact that “The Word unites with the nature of an individual who resembles to the nature of the species. Doesn’t representation make room for a second person in Christ?” Hence,

the icon is not a mere earthly occurrence; but it is the hypostasis of the Word that the iconographer portrays here, with the traits which singularize His human nature which are transfigured due to the closeness with the Word²³

On the other hand, misunderstanding 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”²⁴, the heretics considered icon worshiping as idolatry. Moreover, they argued that each time we pray to God in front of a holy icon, we become like those who “have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being, birds and animals and reptiles”²⁵ Their words have remained senseless, for when we speak about the holy icons and we cherish them, “the image of the truth” arises in front of our eyes, away from the false idol

²² *Ibidem*, p. 171.

²³ *Ibidem*, p.. 173–174.

²⁴ Ex., 20,4–5.

²⁵ Cf. Rm. 1.23.

deception. For this reason God sets a limit to the Hebrews in the Old Testament, so that they might not fall under idolatry and estrange from the truth. Therefore, in the second commandment of the Decalogue, the subject discussed is represented by

the idols and the wanders of pagans and not of the holy icons, which are not idols, but are exactly what they were in the Old Testament, the images of cherubim demanded by God whose worship has never been disapproved by the Saviour Jesus Christ and the Holy Apostles, who have entered and prayed in the temple in Jerusalem so many times²⁶.

The Holy Fathers have also illustrated the fact, that the icons through the grace of the Holy Spirit, have the power to teach the mysteries of the Orthodox creed even to the most illiterate people. Thus, they said, those who did not know about the Crucifixion of the Lord, looking at the icon of His passions and contemplating it, “fell on their knees and prayed to Him” Meditating upon all this, St. John of Damascus noted, that:

we do not worship matter, but what is depicted in the icon, as we do not worship the matter from which the gospel is made, nor do we worship the matter of the cross, but the image of the cross. So, what distinguishes the cross that bears the figure of God from one that does not bear it? Same about the Mother of God. The worship we show for Her ascends to the One she gave life to. Same about the deeds of the holy men, they guide us towards manhood, zeal, imitation of their virtues and towards the glory of God²⁷

The victory of the holy icons at the Ecumenical Council 7th shed light on issues related to their worship and the role they should have in the cult of the Church. It was then clearly stated the fact that:

The Word of the incommensurable Father, of you, Mother of God, became commensurable by the Incarnation; and the impure image, turning back to the original image was clothed with miraculous adornment. Therefore, by confessing salvation, we imagine it by deed and word.

This was the starting point for the Holy Fathers and Church Apologists to illustrate the idea that “the icon is based precisely on the fact that God-the Man, Jesus Christ, had a mother who can be portrayed” They have also pointed out the fact that God-the Father, being unimaginable and imperceptible, cannot be represented.

Why can't we discover the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Because we have not seen Him ... If we had seen and known Him as happened in the case of His Son, we would try to describe and portray Him (the Father), too²⁸

We thus, understand from those illustrated above, that the theology of icon justifies its truth in the context of man's creation “in the image of God”. Hence, it follows that Christ the Saviour

²⁶ A. LEFTER, *The Right Teachings on the worship of Saints, Holy Relics and Holy Icons*, in MO, no. 3–4 (1984), p. 213–214.

²⁷ JOHN DAMASCENE, *Dogmatics*, trans. D. Fecioru, Bucharest 2005, p. 215.

²⁸ The documents of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Doc. 4, in *The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith*, electronic edition, in the Collection “Apologeticum”, St. Nectarius Publishing House, Bucharest 2003, p. 34–38.

does not incarnate in a strange, heterogeneous element, but He regains his own heavenly image and archetype, for God made man after the Word's heavenly manhood²⁹, pre-existing in the Wisdom of God³⁰

4. The combat of the Church with the modern forms of “iconoclasm”. The Communist Era in Romania

The conflict between the Church and the iconoclasm still continued after the 7th Ecumenical Council. The ever-growing meaning alienation and content despoilment of the values of Christian Tradition has given rise to complex issues and challenges over the centuries, for which the Church had to provide answers once more. The image of the secular man, sadly dominated by materialism, concupiscence, ignorance, indifference and passivity, thus, brings up a new challenge to the Orthodox confession work. Starting with the Reformation, this model of iconoclasm is largely promoted and popularized in our society. The first change is the one related to the emergence of *sola Scriptura* concept, which was intended, among other things, to replace image-based thoughts with word-centred ones. From the living, working and confessing image of divine truth, there is a subtle passage to the authority of the written word. Therefore, from an apologetic point of view, some explanations are required. Thus, it is crystal clear that:

the iconoclastic spirit of Reformation and Modernity influences not only the iconic dimension of theology, thought and spirituality centred on the Incarnation event essentially, but also the liturgical mystagogy, directly connected with the ecclesial experience. The tradition of the Church is fundamentally iconic, structuring the act of worship in Spirit and Truth. According to this type of understanding, the word does not exclude the image, but it transfigures it in icon. And the written word is united with the Incarnate Word, which is the icon of God the Father³¹

In addition, the militant atheism of the communist era has always fought against the Church. Disguised as different ideological or conceptual practices, economic or moralizing, this authoritative iconoclasm has intensely disturbed the ecclesial life of the Orthodox Christians in our country. Prophetically, the phenomenon was identified and denounced by one of the most prominent confessors and apologists of our Church, professor Ioan Gh. Savin, a modern martyr. He speaks freely about the danger that was to fall upon Romania, somehow reminding us of Soloviev, who had foreseen the Communist regime in his famous “Tales of the Antichrist” The Ro-

²⁹ Cf. 1 Cor. 15,47-49: “The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man”

³⁰ P. EVDOKIMOV, *The art of the icon*, p. 180.

³¹ A. LEMENI (ed.), *Orthodox Apologetics*, vol. I, Bucharest, 2013, p. 299.

manian author structures his ideas in a different way, this time providential for the topic of our meeting. *Contemporary Iconoclasts and Apostates* is the paper where we can find references not only to the danger concerning traditional alienation but also to the scourge of atheist Communism, which was imminent.

The appearance of Bolshevism, as well as its disappearance, depends on religion. The fight existing now in Russia is not only between capital and labour, between the bourgeoisie and revolution, between nationalism and internationalism. These are only fragments, mere aspects of the great struggle between the spirit and matter, between man and beast, between Satan and God, between Christ and Antichrist. Bolshevism will appear there and will live as long as faith, which asserts the existence of a divine order governing the destiny of the world, is shadowed and decayed. This also explains the great combat that the Russian communism began against religion. And the explanation is quite the same regarding the appearance and sudden triumph of Russian communism; Russia being a classic country of religious mysticism and political conservatism³².

The Romanian Orthodox Church fell into this movement. Led by the patriarch Justinian Marina she has undergone the fierce oppression of the painful regime. God did not allow the adornment of His house to perish, but furthermore, it was adorned by the blood of the martyrs who suffered in camps and prisons for our respect and freedom, for our Orthodox creed. As in the early Christian ages the blessed father Justinian, the servants of the Holy Altars offered themselves to be sacrificed so that the love for the Church would never perish, faith would never die and the holy places would never be abandoned.

We want to draw attention and remind of the example given by the hieromonach Gherasim Iscu (1912–1951), the last abbot of Tismana monastery. He was arrested on September 26th, 1948. On May 21st, 1949, he was sued for “crime against social order”. He was first imprisoned in Craiova, transferred to Aiud, the White Gate and finally to Targu Ocna, where he met his Maker. Before he died he asked his cell-mates to take him to the deathbed of the one who had tortured him terribly while we had been a prisoner at the White Gate. His torturer was almost dead, since he suffered from end-stage tuberculosis. It was Christmas night of 1951. After the confession, the young man said, “Do you hear brother? The angels are singing!”, opening his eyes and asking for forgiveness for everything he had done to him. Father Iscu, who was as weak as his executioner, replied, “I forgive you wholeheartedly, and like me, my brothers also forgive you, and if we forgive you, Christ, Who is better than we are, will certainly forgive you, too. There will be a place for you in heaven, likewise”. After having confessed one to the other, both of them met their Creator in the same night³³

³² I. GH. SAVIN, *Contemporary Iconoclasts and Apostates*, Bucharest 1995, p. 61–62.

³³ I. APOSTOLACHE, *Men and places in the history of the Church in Oltenia*, Craiova 2011, p. 134.

5. The iconographic work in the Romanian Orthodox Church today.

Conclusions

By virtue of the sacrifice of these martyrs, after the Revolution of 1989, the curtain of the communist persecution finally vanished. The light of faith started burning again vigorously, thawing inert hearts and dispersing the atheistic fog of the eye of mind. People regained once again the power and confidence to really participate at the cultic life, an imperative that was required by appropriate education. This is the way in which the icons returned to the places from where they had been formerly taken away by the Communists. Once the teaching of religion has been introduced into the schools, under the guidance of the Church, the Romanian education enjoys the beauty and blessing of the Orthodox icon, the grace and protection of the Holy Cross; the memorable achievement after a long period of darkness.

In the Romanian Orthodox Church, the sacrificial and confessional work of the priests and faithful flourished, blooming little by little to reach to the peaks of Christian perfection. The beauty of the worship places and, as such, the outstanding quality of pictorial art, have illustrated a "timing and timeless" involvement of our hierarchs. The permanent desire for an academic ascension in the field of theology, culture and Church's art has been preserved and developed in all over the Romanian Patriarchate. Therefore, we can speak in a practical way about another great gift that the Romanian Orthodox Church developed and receive in contact with theology: the research and practice in the domain of Sacred Arts. Masters and disciples together, all of them receiving or having received their education in the Faculty of Theology from Romania, particularize the Orthodox iconography of these lands. From my own experience, without pretending to be a specialist, I can notice the fact that Brâncoveanu's style enjoys lastingness, a style that was received by our ancestors as a gift made by the Holy Martyr Prince, Constantine of Wallachia.

With every fresco our painters create, they open true windows to heaven, blessed on the great day of blessing, when the high priest utters the gracious words:

O Lord our God, Who created us after your image and likeness; Who redeems us from our former of the ancient curse through Your man-befriending Christ, Who took upon Himself the form of a servant and became man; Who having taken upon Himself our likeness remade Your Saints of the first dispensation, and through Whom also we are refashioned in the Image of Your pure blessedness; Your Saints we venerate as being in Your Image and Likeness, and we adore and glorify You as our Creator...³⁴.

³⁴ *Blessing Prayer for an icon*, in: *Euchologion*, Bucharest 2012, p. 195.

SUMMARY

In the Orthodox Church the icon has a very important role. Liturgically speaking it is an object, which is indispensable for the cult. Moreover, from theological point of view, the icon represents the mirror through the eternity. Through the icons we honour our Lord Jesus Christ, the Mother of God and the saints, but never the material of which the icon is made. In this study the author tries to make a short analyse of the theology of icon from the orthodox point of view putting it in the context of the Romanian Orthodoxy.

Key words: icon, orthodox theology, Transfiguration, Jesus Christ the Son of God, communist period, apologetic, iconoclasm

Kilka ważnych uwag dotyczących prawosławnej teologii ikony

Streszczenie

W Kościołach prawosławnych ikona pełni bardzo ważną rolę. Od strony liturgicznej jest ona elementem niezbędnym do prawidłowego spełniania kultu. Ponadto z punktu widzenia teologii ikona reprezentuje lustro dające wierzącym wgląd w wieczność. Poprzez ikonę oddajemy cześć Jezusowi Chrystusowi, Jego Przczystej Matce i świętym, jednakże nigdy przedmiotem kultu nie jest materiał, z jakiego ikona jest wykonana. W niniejszym studium autor przedstawił krótką analizę teologii ikony w ujęciu prawosławnym, osadzając ją w kontekście prawosławia rumuńskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: ikona, teologia prawosławna, przemienienie, Jezus Chrystus, komunizm, apologetyka, ikonoklazm.

Bibliography

- APOSTOLACHE I., *Men and places in the history of the Church in Oltenia*, Craiova 2011.
Blessing Prayer for an icon, in: *Euchologion*, Bucharest 2012.
- BUNGE G., *The Rublev Trinity: The Icon of the Trinity by the monk-painter Andrei Rublev*”, second edition, foreword and translation by deacon Ioan I. Ica jr., Sibiu 2016.
- CERCEL C.E., *Iconostasis and the Eucharist. The role of the iconostasis in the Orthodox Church*, Craiova 2015.
- CHIFAR N., *The history of Christianity*, vol. I, Sibiu 2007.
- DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *About the rites celebrated in the Holy Synaxis — mystery and contemplation*, critical translation by deacon Ioan Ica jr, after G. Hei / A.-M. Ritter, *Corpus Dionysiacum* II (PTS 36), Berlin – New York 1991, pp. 65–68, 79–94, in Deac. Ioan Ica jr, *From Dionysius the Areopagite to Simeon The New Theologian. Complete series of Byzantine liturgical comments. Studies and texts*, Sibiu 2011.

- EVDOKIMOV P., *Orthodoxy*, translation from French by Irineu Ioan Popa, Bucharest 1996.
- EVDOKIMOV P., *The Art of the Icon A theology of beauty*, translated by Grigore Moga and Petru Moga, Bucharest 1992.
- GREGORY PALAMAS, *Against Achindin*, VI, 9, in: PG 150, col 823.
- GREGORY PALAMAS, *Homily 34*, in: PG 151, col. 249.
- JOHN DAMASCENE, *Dogmatics*, translation from Greek, introduction and notes by Fr. Prof. Dumitru Fecioru, Bucharest 2005.
- JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *Speech at the royal feast, the feast of Virgin Mary and the Saints*, translation from old Greek by Fr. PhD Gabriel Mandrila and Laura Mandrila, Bucharest 2010.
- LEFTER A., *The Right Teachings on the worship of Saints, Holy Relics and Holy Icons*, in MO, no. 3-4 (1984), PAGES.
- Living God. Orthodox Catechism*, translation into Romanian and afterword by Ioan Nicolae, Alba Iulia 2009.
- Orthodox Apologetics*, vol. I, coordinator Adrian Lemeni, Bucharest 2013.
- POPESCU D., *Jesus Christ Pantocrator*, Bucharest 2005.
- SAVIN IOAN Gh., *Contemporary Iconoclasts and Apostates*, Bucharest 1995.
- The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith*, electronic edition, in the Collection "Apologeticum", St. Nectarius Publishing House, Bucharest 2003.
- USPENSKY L., LOSSKY V., *The meaning of icons*, 2nd edition, translation from English by Anca Popescu, Bucharest 2007.

IONIȚĂ APOSTOLACHE, an Orthodox priest from the diocese of Craiova, at the Obedeanu Church. He is also a PhD Lecturer at the Faculty of Theology of Craiova. His academic fields of research are: Apologetics and Syriac Theology; Author of many papers in some know Periodicals from Romania and from outside the country. His most important books are: *Christology and Mystic in the Syriac Theology* (2013), *The Orthodox Apologetic — confession and apostleship* (2017), *Spiritual words, peoples and places from the history of the Church from Oltenia* (2017). E-mail: nutuapostolache@yahoo.com