

Text 24: The Icon

Wisdom 13:1ff. speaks of “seeing God through the visible goods.” Faith is a 'seeing,' specifically through the icon that is creation, and especially man. Also the pre-Christian cosmos and man. For “God’s immortal life-giving force is in all things” (*Wisdom 12:1*). There is even an aesthetic aspect to that iconic faith: “The Maker of all beauty has (...) created” (*Wisdom 13:3*). Jesus’ appearance among people—He calms the storm, for example—is merely the resumption of a fallen—because sinful—cosmos and humanity, and at the same time a further continuation of the iconic nature of things.

Maria.

Our Eastern brothers and sisters are thoroughly Trinitarian and, in their wake, Marian: “The Son of the Father, transcending the understanding, depicted himself by becoming man in you, Mother of God, Mary: he restored the damaged image (' eikon ') (of God in man) its original appearance and caused a divine radiance to radiate from it” ¹.

Note : 'Glans' is not an empty poetic expression in the language of the Eastern Churches! 'Glans' means ' doxa ', glory, that of God Himself insofar as He displays His sublime life-force. Mary is the starting point for a further iconization of the cosmos and humanity.

Icons.

Now we can better understand the meaning and the place of the icons. The entire creation is iconic. Humanity is it. The recreated cosmos and humanity are it even more so thanks to Jesus' birth from Mary and what followed from it.

Julius Tyciak ²— “The icon is only understandable from the ‘ theiosis ’, the deification, of the world. The participation of the world in God’s glory rests on Jesus’ incarnation as the apostle John interprets it.” Indeed: for John, Jesus is the wisdom of the world or the universe that enters into a human existence in Mary’s womb.

The icon as ' sacramental '.

¹ T. Spidlik , *Les grands mystiques Russes*, Paris, 1979, 324.

² Julius Tyciak, *Morgenländische Mystik*, Patmos verlag , Düsseldorf, 1949.-

Tyciak .-- “The icon is much more than a method of prayer. (...). It is a kind of sacramental .” -- ‘Sacramental’ is a theological term that designates a gesture or a thing carrying life force by virtue of ecclesiastical consecration. A ‘sacrament’ in the diminished degree, -- if you will.

“In the consecration of icons, the Church calls the Holy Spirit Himself upon the icon. Only within such a range does an image in wood or the like become ‘pneumatic’, that is, a bearer of divine life forces” (thus John of Damascus). (J. Tyciak , oc, 22). In this sense, the icon is a kratophany , that is, the manifestation of ‘kratos’ , life force. In our Western theological language: the icon bestows graces. For the Eastern Christian: the saint or likewise depicted in the icon works through it.

The whole dogmatism.

John of Damascus was the quintessential defender of ‘image worship’. However, this was often very misunderstood in the West. “All things are icons to him” (Tyciak). Harnack , the Protestant theologian, believes that the entire dogmatics which defines Christianity in its essence according to John of Damascus stands or falls with the concept of ‘icon’.

And indeed: just as we characterized Christianity in the spirit of John, Harnack is right. - The entire creation is icon or ‘mystery’. Since Jesus, it has been so to a deepened degree. And the material thing, endowed by the Church with pneumatic life force, which is called ‘icon’, is merely one type of icon. “The veneration of icons was the most comprehensible expression of the pictorial character of all things that were renewed since Jesus’ incarnation. Creation had become transparent, shining through, and this transparency became abundantly clear in the icons (...).” (Tyciak , oc, 27).

Sacral.

Tyciak , oc, 27. -- On the one hand, the secularist interpretation of things. On the other hand, the mystical-hieratic interpretation thereof by the faithful people, the hermits, the praying, the deeply devout hierarchs, the thinkers. -- One should also not forget that the advancing Islam, which displaced Eastern Christianity, was decidedly hostile to icons. It is not surprising that the General Council of 869 asked that the icons be paid the same honor as the Gospel book. In the third canon, the council says: “If one does not venerate the icon of the Savior, then one will also not be able to behold His face at His second coming.”

With this, we hope to have brought the axiomatics of our Eastern co-religionists a little closer.