

The Ecclesiastical Image as a Conveyor of Communication and Information in Pilgrimage Tourism

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Abstract

Primary semantic condensations through symbols cannot be linguistically shaped as a whole by man. Condensation through images and symbols, which takes a form perceived both mentally and sensually, leads us to the study of the ecclesiastical image and how it affects expression and communication, functioning as an essential part of this condensation. The icon is intertwined with religious worship and religious tourism, as at the same time its creation is a special artistic system. As such, the system has its principles and values. Not looking for photographic resemblance to the original and its representation, this particular visual system records some of its features that shape its existence. The deliberate removal of the temporary and the perishable, but also the avoidance of attributing personal characteristics and emotions to the forms, are decisive elements in the formation of a form of communication. This communication draws its main part from the sacred and speaks of spiritual life, and which also draws from the treasure of myths and leads to religiosity. Also, this communication is ultimately based on icons that survive through their metaphysical truth and which do not need to change form every time to be perceived by the believer-viewer. The similarity observed in the interiority, in the moral-spiritual dimension of the icons is the one that defines them and separates them from any other art form over time.

Keywords: ecclesiastical art, icons, communication, byzantine art, image.

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1. Introduction

From Aristotle's exhortation to take advantage of leisure time to live properly, baths of the Romans, the "elite" looking for new experiences, the travellers who travel and capturing their travels verbally or visually, up to modern mass tourism and alternative forms of tourism (Lagos, 2016: 21-35 & Lickorish - Jenkins, 2004: 2-26), travelling to different geographical locations -among others- aimed at satisfying the traveller's need to contact the Divine. Man, as *Homo Viator*, according to the existential philosopher Gabriel Marcel, seeks in his travels the contact with the past, the present and the endless space-time of the divine.

At the same time, multiculturalism, globalization and common reference points in the divine element, characterize modern post-industrial societies. In these societies, where the certainties of modernism turn into uncertainties, tourism can be described as a hyperglobalizer, as it is one of the most important forces of homogenization in the world (Held et al., 2000: 327). Despite the multitude of activities, goods and services involved in the concept of tourism, the dimensions which take on a socio-political-economic level (Fletcher et al., 2019: 24-25), but also the interdisciplinary and communication framework which forms each time, the tourism system, as a social construction, provides experiences that relate the individual to worlds that extend beyond the real.

Although religious or pilgrimage tourism is referred to as a new form of tourism that arose - among other forms of alternative tourism - from social, economic, political and environmental needs. Historically, this type of tourism, it seems to be the purpose of many trips, but also to exist in the motivations of mass tourism. Adopting Leiper's view of tourist destinations as "places where people travel and choose to stay for a while to experience certain features", it should be noted that religious tourism destination, in addition to its other dimensions, it is part of the religious life of a believer. Pilgrimage is part of the way of realizing religious life, which is determined by dogmatic rules. So the purpose of such a trip is to fulfil his worship beliefs. The realization of the worship and pilgrimage life of the believer is mediated structurally and functionally by the ecclesiastical image.

2. Ecclesiastical Icon – Religious Artwork.

In the religious reality of Christianity, the communication and transmission of information take place on a general level through the image - icon. The icon is a Bible for the simple and illiterate believers and at the same time, a visual theology for religious theorists and scholars. It is an evangelical language and a representation of those which refer to the written tradition of the church. This language does not function as an aesthetic practical method but as a revelation of the truth. L. Ouspensky notes: *As the word of Scripture is a verbal image, so is the image of a painted evangelical word* (Ouspensky, 1993: 176).

Although the word icon is etymologically derived from the verb *εἰκω*, which means to imitate, in traditional Byzantine and Russian creation, the icon always refers to theological realities and not to a naturalistic rendering of events and persons. The icon is more than a naturalistic rendering, it is an indispensable liturgy. And creating icons means *theologize in various colors the inscrutable mysteries of the Divine Economy*, (I.M.T.P, 2000: 28).

In the same direction is the view of M. Siotou, who argues that the image has the meaning of simile, parable, description, painting (Siotou, 1990: 45). F. Kontoglou, finally, thinks that the icon *is painted in such a way as to lift us from this perishable world, and to make us smell that new air of the Kingdom of God* (Kontoglou, 1993).

The image in the ecclesiastical view is treated primarily as dogmatic truth and not as an artificial object. The mode of expression and the manner are not the primary concern. Although when it comes to the icon itself, the first thought comes in mind is the image with a specific style, the icon - image in the patristic texts which is the expression of the truth itself. An illustration is not just a sensation of reality. It expresses aesthetically a philosophy that the persons depicted are not physical entities that pre-existed and acted in a specific way, but persons who are also present in church life actively. Through the active action of the characters, a special two-way relationship with the viewer is formed. The faces exist with reference to their existence and at the same time, the viewer exists and operates within the Christian doctrine through them. They are his mediators and guides to the journey of completion.

The creation of icons is a sacred art aimed at serving high spiritual ideals, vividly depicting mystical idealism and depicting the spiritual world of Orthodox worship. At the same time, it is a way of sensitizing the spiritual world of the Church as well as of spiritualization of the material and terrestrial world. Everything emphasizes and expresses the spirit in Orthodox art. While the material element exists to the extent that it serves the expression of the spiritual. It is the *means for the spiritual truths of faith to be felt* (Theodorou, 1998: 220). As such, it has a strong dogmatic foundation in the Church's perceptions.

Through the search for an answer to the great theoretical problem of art for the relation of the visual form to reality, the theology for the image has been formulated. A theology that, through a realistic perspective, argues that the iconography is not intended to capture substance, physical properties, or mental states but to reveal the existence (Demus, 1976: 5-10). It encompasses its form and aesthetic performance, and it is not the object of the search for the artist of Orthodox ecclesiastical art. The artist portrays the face in its form, does not use his imagination, and of course cannot improvise, since any deviation is considered to be a catalyst for the authenticity of the icon. It acts as an instrument that reshapes forms. It reproduces a language, a way of being that depicts the subject, and at the same time, as a language, it shapes an aesthetic conception that dominated the Byzantine era and continues - through regressions- even today.

Russian scholars of the icon (Florenskii, Ouspensky) will set conditions for the existence of the icon and will argue that the depiction of a person is an aesthetic record of his holiness. At the same time, they emphasize that the physical form cannot represent holiness, no matter how much it corresponds to reality (Ouspensky, 1978: 198). The visual language, which is mentioned above, has an essential place in the dogmatic size of the icon and like any language uses an alphabet to make it happen. The person and the performance of his holiness are depicted in a specific way, by using rules. A style is been followed, in our case the Byzantine, which includes normative ways of rendering the faces, which in the end these ways are only some and are unable to convey the reality of the ecclesiastical tradition. Taking into account the return of the traditional Byzantine and Russian icon, nowadays, and the church's obsession to establish it not in the spectrum of patristic texts, but with rules and specific techniques, the need to consider and possibly revise such a style dealing with ecclesiastical depiction becomes imperative. After all, let us keep in mind that there have been changes in hagiography that cannot be understood through dogmatic signs. For example, the transition from the art of the Komnenian era with the tall figures to the era of the Macedonian school with the square solid figures cannot be attributed or interpreted with theological truths. At the same time, it cannot be argued that such a thing changed a dogmatic part of the depiction or the essence of the icon. The only truth always prevails and it is attributed. It's just that the way of painting changes through the dictates of history and so there is the possibility of studying the evolution of the icon over time. Staticity in the icon is a danger to their very theological existence since nowadays a purely artificial dissemination of art with an incomplete theoretical or rather symbolic background is apparent.

The presence of art, of course, aims at rendering the figures faithfully and at the same time in a way that corresponds to the spiritual state of the depicted. Their physical condition is not attributed to their whole and real physical characteristics but in an abstract and perhaps selective way. This is the peculiarity of Orthodox painting. An art that, in its course, became a place of alternation of painting solutions, always aims at the performance of the forms and the reduction to the original.

We could argue that iconographic art, as it was formed after the iconoclasm and the consolidation of form, aims to create a communication framework which the presentation of image-form will lead to reductions in archetypal images to the believer. The painting method is the instrument of such communication since through the style the relationship of the image with the spectator-believer is created. In the end, it is the only -not essential- tool that the artist has and can modify, of course not with his aesthetic preferences. Even at this point, there is a deeper reason for the nature of the style he chooses (Vasilaki, 1995: 9-30).

Byzantine art, as a religious art or rather as a product of the religious era that Christianity reaches its peak, is the most authentic mirror of the synthesis of different cultural elements made by Byzantine culture (Runciman, 1975: 54). Hellenistic, Greco-Roman, Arabic and Iranian elements are combined in various ways, giving a unique whole. It is worth noting Kordis' view of the Byzantine painting system, which argues that although discreetly retained certain features of Hellenistic naturalism, it relied mainly on the expressionism of late antiquity (Kordis, 2001: 51).

The art of Byzantine painting has a certain binding code that sacrifices the naturalistic performance on the altar of transcendence. The purpose of the hagiographer in this particular form of the icon is the expression of the theological depth. Characteristics such as beauty, grace, liveliness are not emphasized. But even when they do exist, in an elementary form, they are always interpreted from a theological point of view. Its goal is not to function as an idol, enclosing within itself the icon itself, but as a carrier of information about the situation beyond the phenomena. It uses symbols to accomplish this goal. Thus the narration of an ecclesiastical image follows transcendental rules that are far removed from everyday life. Let us remember Kontoglou's view of the spiritual character of the icon: *The character of the holy icons of Orthodox hagiography is by no means natural, but is functional and symbolic, they were spiritual* (Kontoglou, 1993: 415).

In a primary study of the icon, we would find that it is primarily *reductive* and *pedagogical*. The icon indicates, teaches and at the same time is a point through which the viewer's encounter with the depicted person or event of his religious tradition takes place. At the same time, however, it works *symbolically* and *substantively*, since it uses a symbolic language and depicts the essence, the face. Also, the icon is a *functional* language as a functional vessel addressed to the eye and senses of the act of worship, *hymnographic* as an exact representation of the hymns of the church, *patriarchal* and *hagiological* as a figurative rendering of patristic texts, *dogmatic* a tool for expressing the doctrines of the church, and finally it is a *temple structure* language since the layout and position of the icons inside the church and the various compositions articulate a theological word.

3. The Connection of the Image and the Ecclesiastical Image.

The distinction of the image in psychological and linear material, internal and external and the parallel acceptance of total communication in combination with the identification of the peculiarities of the ecclesiastical image within its theological context, lead to the need for a synthetic investigation of the image which intentionally tries to represent spiritual realities.

With the adoption of a specific visual code and the mediation of specific cultural education, sensory information is captured, which their interpretation is based largely on objectification of the world and not on the subjectivity of each viewer. It could be argued that the whole process of representation is a convention, where the element of arbitrariness, or in this case of divine authority, dominates, even determining the mode of vision. If we consider the representation of a reality in a non-naturalistic way as an alternative, but in a way that has reductions in metaphysical or extraterrestrial forces, then it is understandable to use symbols that define the ecclesiastical image as such. The similarity relationship in such a representation of depicted and physical being is minimal to non-existent. Every natural feature or image of nature can only be rendered through the adoption of a particular mode of reflection that is purely spiritual. It even maintains its spirituality even when it borrows images of reality to transform them spiritually. At the same time, it transmits information through an image that is more immediately perceptible as a cognitive object than a word.

Of course, the consolidation of facial features and the non-expression of emotions in the ecclesiastical image, does not allow the information through a face-to-face process that involves empathy. A virtual process is required and used which works proportionally only to some extent with the senses and which of course does not allow emotions such as joy, sadness, pain to appear in the depicted persons. A relationship of direct communication through the image of the person does not seem to exist, as we originally described it, in the Orthodox ecclesiastical depiction. Something we find in the western style of illustration. In the latter, emotions and expression, meaning and content are imprinted on the same surface, on the face. The Western icon does not need to be symbolized. It is immediately perceptible through its naturalistic representations.

In contrast, at the Orthodox icon, the symbols are not elements of a causal and accidental process, nor they concern the immediate environment. We could say that in terms of semiotics, signifier and signified are completely distinct and that their relationship is based on a purely spiritual, theological background. Through such prepositional conventions, Orthodox depiction becomes a language with a different meaning, always giving priority to the symbolic image. But it is a language that is not understood by everyone. If images, in general, can have a wider range of words than they can understand, this is not the case with the Orthodox

ecclesiastical image. The latter requires a code for its construction and then for its recruitment. It requires a spectator - faithful to "read" it. And in fact, he has to read it in a certain theological and liturgical way. This is not the case in a natural image since as a representation of reality it is easily understood by the viewer and in fact by a very wide range of viewers.

4. The Communication Framework and the Information Framework of the Orthodox Icon.

The realization of any communication process obliges the borrowing of tools of expression which in one way or another lead to the coding and transmission of a message. In other words, it requires a language that enables everyone to shape the events in the other's brain. At the same time, the possibilities of expression can lead to verbal and non-verbal communication. The icon belongs to that part of communication where words have no place. The message here is shaped, illustrated, through visual cues. That is, through the imprint on a surface of a specific imaging code. What might otherwise be said or written here is painted. The icon is an object of visual communication, which requires a response. The latter even works decisively for the way the icon itself is formed.

The context in which a communication process is formed and carried out works equally decisively. In the case of the ecclesiastical image, this context is purely theological and constantly presupposes the distinction between material and spiritual. Ideas, memories, visions and events -that move within the framework of the imaginary, and which are bounded by cultic meanings- become the content of the message that aims at the emotional reaction of the believer-spectator and his participation in worship. The aforementioned move in the area of the inviolable and as such involves the extraterrestrial element.

The traditional dichotomy of spirit and matter, which determines all the intentional construction and operation of the icon, is based on the assumption that even in modern information culture there is something that can be extracted from its material realization and live free from the body. In other words, there is an intangible substance that encompasses the essence of the world. The above belief strengthens the religious desires and faith that exist and which have a deep meaning for many people and is associated with spiritual and physical discipline.

At the same time, the above conviction works decisively in the way of transmitting the information contained in the dogmatic part of each religion. In the case that we examine here, in addition to genetic, molecular, mathematical or other considerations for information, the message acquires a material substance and is connected with a specific meaning, it is coded into a signal and transmitted through the icon. However, the removal of the material basis in ecclesiastical iconography also means the simultaneous release of information. The information is not affected -or at least expected- by changes that occur in the daily life of the viewer-believer and moves freely in space and time. So, communication does not move in the context of more general and holistic communication, but specializes and information draws its existence as well as its mode of operation from extra-terrestrial spheres where they can unlock the secrets of life and especially death. This removal of the material substance from information is an imaginary and even cultural act. As such an act constructs or is ultimately constructed by the binary entity of spirit-matter. But the element that determines and leads it is the presence of a model and the simultaneous certainty of its existence. So the message transmits specific and controlled information to the number and content. If the message was random, then the amount of information it would transmit would be large and no one could confidently guess what would follow. Predictive structuring of the information, in the case of the icon, ensures or expects the minimization of a noise that could work distortively of the expected end result. The information here tries, through a strict structure, to leave out the randomness. This is reminiscent of Shannon's view that there is always a way to encode a message to minimize noise. Of course, this is not possible in a communication act, since the information is ultimately created by the interaction between standard and random.

If art becomes a way of searching for the ultimate, then the icon, through its dogmatic and functional character, becomes a way of searching and at the same time experiencing absoluteness, where it is related to an eternal search. The main difference between ecclesiastical art and any other art form is that this art embodies a specific code of communication with strict structures, both in the code itself and in its technique itself. The overall entity of man does not experience their reality directly but through faith and a sense of the divine. Through the latter, the visible, and in particular the icon, leads to the invisible. The icon, as Uspensky

states, sanctifies vision and transforms it into *σπασία*. This is done through a sacred language of symbols where it is mediated by the divine presence. Here we are talking about extraterrestrial communication codes or better for extraterrestrial intermediaries in communication. It is the reduction of communication structures to the divine.

The direct possession of the transcendental is not attributed to Orthodox ecclesiastical art through the reflection of flesh and blood, nor the placement of persons in the contemporary environment of the artist. Something similar happens with the performance of the psyche, the feelings of the depicted persons. The latter has no place in ecclesiastical illustration. Even the religious feeling of the creator, through his subjective expression, has no place in the icon. The icon is sacred, and as such cannot move in the human biosphere. It does not express the occasional, the accidental and does not emotionally interpret the objects of the experience. At the same time, it does not let the imagination play with colour and shape in the multidimensional space, nor does it look for artistic solutions in mathematical rules.

The search for surrealism above reality, the deepening inwardness leads the icon out of the things of this world. At the same time, it functions as the bearer of a non-cosmic power, where it springs from the theological context in which it is formed. Let's remember the phrase of Paul Klee, who in search of a world beyond what he experienced wrote: *on the highest step there is the mysterious*. And this mystery in the picture is always present through the symbols. The symbols unite the visible with the invisible, the divine with the earthly, and the empirical with the ideal. This eschatological composition of earth and heaven takes place in the icon by depicting the being, through its resemblance to the imaginary form of the celestial figure, which is transformed into a body on the surface of the icon. Of course, the icon, in its purely symbolic value, cannot reach art, in the sense that it does not seek the perfection of art as such. In this perspective, the icon is a simple drawing. But it is a drawing subject to spiritual laws. Overcoming the perceptible and the comprehensible is an end in itself for the icon since its goal is an "abstract concept", the world of deification.

A code usually works in a way that introduces a dimension of space and time, which is directly related to language and communication. The way in which the elements of this code are arranged in space indicates logical or narrative relationships. So, multiple connections are made between its elements, where they either submit to each other or each function as an autonomous unit. In visual communication, in a specific way, we convey one or more messages and the receiver-viewer becomes aware of the facts. Through a visual language, more specifically a hierarchical communication system, information is transmitted. In the case of the icon we are looking here, this information takes on another dimension.

The evolution of the icon is defined by a more general philosophy where its central point is the image-viewer relationship. It was this relationship, the reference of the form to the viewer, which was the main goal of the artists. In their quest to achieve it in the best possible way, they created many painting modes. Their main criterion was the possibility of icon's relativization to the viewer. Obviously, an artist's imagination cannot function, nor is it legitimate. Undoubtedly, the artist does not aim at personal communication with the viewer but at a collective level of communication which works along with the ecclesiastical structures. In other words, the hagiographer is the mean, since it expresses a spiritual world, the world of icons. This theological discourse of the icon can be realized through collective work and in relation to tradition.

Speaking of this liturgical art, Kontoglou considers it immovable, just as the Church of Christ expresses it (Kontoglou, 1993). This view expresses the general dogmatic context of the church, which, however, raises a crucial communication issue. How can communication and information be transmitted in a specific social context, which is far from the one in which they were formed? It becomes even more complex to consider that this information entails a specific action and is not simply a transfer of historical information. The information here contains the element of "topicality" and is an element of integration into the specific social ecclesiastical context, with all that entails. Icons are images that are deliberately designed and their interpretation moves to specific limits. They are not works of art to which we can give a free interpretation.

The importance of the sense of sight for modern man is enormous. A constant flow of images bombs him and passes information through symbols. But the icons are occupied by a different kind of symbolism, which is based not on the experience of everyday life but the experience of mystical orthodoxy.

Abstraction is used as an indication of eschatology, one that reveals a unique reality, the divine. Through abstraction, the spectator-believer is led to a different world, mysterious, where the elements of everyday life

in their entirety have no place. It could be argued that this abstract process works not only under mysterious conditions but also under pedagogical expediencies. Through specific shapes and colours, the person is led to a supernatural encounter.

The icon, as it is claimed, is a functional and supervisory tool in an ecclesiastical education. It depicts historical events that aim to convey information to the viewer through a visual code and at the same time to form an emotional or better spiritual relationship with the depicted persons. The believer, having the image of a specific saint in his mind, addresses him and communicates with him. In everyday life, one could talk about one-way communication or metaphysical communication, if it can be defined as such. According to the theology of the image, the depicted saint communicates with the spectator, forming a loving relationship with him. This love is expressed by the three-quarter face or posture, the total or partial contemplation of the face. In contrast, with the side profile, there is no such communication. Such a form depicts non-saints (for example, Judas or the soldiers, etc.) or sometimes saints who with this position declare a very important event.

Symbolism, as a direct presumption of total consciousness, works as a revelation of man's relationship with himself and his relationship with the environment. Existence is directly related to these primordial forms, the symbols, and in fact not only to the organic part of existence, but also to the highest expression, the spiritual. Consciously and subconsciously, phenomena imply some kind of symbolism, in one way or another. Coming to the religious space, we find that there are very few phenomena that remain outside a symbolic process. Initially, what is considered a sign of the absolute is transformed through social processes into an aesthetic sign, with magical or metaphysical properties. In the religious process, the symbol, logical or degraded, performs its unaltered mission, to turn an object or an act into something other than what it seems, to be initially the object of simple experience. Thus, through symbols, the individual participates by substituting sacred objects or events. The latter acquires timelessness through their ability to reveal the truth. A truth that often makes the sacred and the human inseparable, and which allows the individual to pass from one to the other and ultimately to experience the essence of religious life. The intense interdependence that is embedded behind the symbolism is not realized by man unless it goes beyond the specific social and dogmatic context in which the symbols have substance. When the individual acts within that context, his need to identify with the universe and touch the divine element prolongs the power of the symbol.

At the same time, symbolism can function as a language, a code of communication, accessible to members of dogma and at the same time inaccessible to foreigners. It is a language that expresses historical, social and mental mood and, in the same time, leads the individual to religious experience through the revelation of all aspects of the very existence.

Almost everywhere in the history of religions, we find a phenomenon of easy imitation of the archetype that identifies, assimilates and unifies heterogeneous levels and unchanging truths (Eliade, 1999: 416-423). The icon and the symbolic thought that it presupposes both for its construction and for its viewing, is a unifying symbol that ceases the fragmentation between man and God. Transformed from object to dogmatic symbol, which expresses a basic unity with specific structures, it leads to the depiction of many aspects of existence, which ultimately tend to coincide with the whole.

5. Discussion and Conclusion.

If the images function as intermediaries between the external world and the inner world of man, then the icon is a very representative example, which aims at specialized information support. This primary mode of expression, through images, was adopted by religion to best convey its dogmatic context. In this way, it met its needs for communication and ultimately for grouping. At the same time, using an art form, it enabled the faithful to come into contact with the unknown and with what goes beyond the common boundaries of understanding and knowledge. Through this particular way of expression, it managed to overcome the barrier of verbal language. It overcomes the difficulties of different verbal codes, but also the difficulties of not knowing how to write. The image through a common genetic background uses common linguistic points such as shape, colour, line, rhythm, etc., to create in the viewer the connection with the Divine.

At the same time, in a process of understanding the world and its causal relationships, icons help to convey a specific form in which they dictate the deepest instincts of man. Their transfer to space and time involves consolidation. This can be understood as a consolidation in the structural units of their creation, but also in the strict observance of the dogmatic and functional framework that it contains. Finally, we could talk about consolidation in the process of transporting them, both from one era to another and from one region to another. In strict Christian practice, new aspects are not given to the icons. They are real insofar as they are not altered by exogenous factors and are not codified by foreign processes to their theological basis. As noted, the history of Orthodox iconography differs in style, but not in the functional aspect of the icons. Iconography seems to have served authoritarian mechanisms, but it has also contributed to their creation or overthrow. A conventional communication system worked through visible points to determine and often complement the expression of another reality, transmitting the information. It could be argued that in addition to a form of language, iconography in the church is also a form of writing, in the sense that it involves the visible point that is part of a more general coded system. The visible point itself binds the sound within the lines, into the shapes and colours, into the composition, and enables it to gain duration and at the same time be used by a multitude of "readers". Reading the icon leads to its reconstruction through the personal interpretation of the viewer. At the same time, through icons, a multitude of images are formed in the imagination of the spectator-believer through reductions.

By following the history of the icon in relation to communication and information, we reach our era, a predominantly visual era. Every moment of it, it is mediated by an external image. The huge amount of images and the authoritarian framework in which they operate raises key questions about the communicative role of the icon today.

In direct interpersonal communication, participants act in some way on the immediate present. As we have seen, the goal of the icon is to transfer it to the spectator's space-time, it is direct communication. However, the possibility of self-regulation, improvement or even suspension in this communication act is not possible on the part of the transmitter. Mutual arrangements do not work. The consolidation and authority require the coincidence of the viewer's experience with that of the image. The void of immediacy is filled with exologic processes, intuitive or better with processes mediated by the Word of God. It is understood that control and manipulation find suitable ground, as space is provided for external interventions. Given that in such communication the senses and emotions are directed, the believer can easily become a follower to cover this immediacy in communication. The above description can find thousands of correspondences in our daily lives since colour and shape are used as artificial tools to replace the lost immediacy.

We come to the crucial question of whether the icon, today, has lost its immediacy, and is an artificial tool, cut off from the structures that created it. Does the mediating dimension of communication, the identification of the term with that of product promotion or even that of dissemination of information, turn the icon into a way of persuading and manipulating the attitudes of the believer-viewer? Does the symbolic part of the Orthodox Christian religion and religions in general, ultimately tend to diminish and give way to the rational? Or, in the end, would it be ideal for the icon to function as a point of reference with which the individual as a unit as well as social groups would balance their thinking and continue their evolutionary course through simultaneous symbolic and rational processes? If, after all, the icon and the image in general, the symbol, the myth are integral elements of our spiritual life, does this exclude them from our material daily life or does it simply require their placement in relation to the context in which they are formed?

Perhaps, in the end, the deepest aspects of our reality, which cannot be understood in any other cognitive way, need images, myths and symbols to reveal the most secret forms of the essence of being. A being which historical and social conditions may determine it - even in its cultic artistic creation - but do not guarantee that eternal search for heaven life. Perhaps, of utopia.

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