

Pr. Stéphane BIGHAM, *Icoana în Tradiția Ortodoxă* (*The Icon in the Orthodox Tradition*), translated by Diana Preda and Cornel Apostol, Theosis Publishing House, Oradea, 2016, 251pp.

The author of “The Icon in the Orthodox Tradition” recognizes and asserts that the icon is a presence in everyday life which seems to be in a evident process of secularisation in our days. Contemplated or only honoured as a liturgical presence, it brings about something as if from another world and it is obviously something from God’s world. God’s presence changes our hearts, it is an ontological dimension bound to us, so let’s not try to smother it!

The book has three chapters and an annex containing observations and data about the lives of some saint-painters of icons: Russian, Bulgarian, of Greek origin or from the Mount Athos.

The first Chapter synthesizes - after a short introduction- the three dogmatic moments of the icon, associated with the three different places and dates: The Sinai Mountain, nearly by the year 1270 B. C., Nazareth, about the year 4 B. C. and Nicaea in the year 787 A.D., in order to express the dogmatic and historical foundation of the icon.

The Second Commandment in the Decalogue indicates the interdiction of any attempt to represent the unseen - an impossible thing, as a matter of fact - and it also prohibits attaching to it any aspect linked to the visible world or to mould an idol having a human or animal shape, representation which would not answer the prayers anyway. Hence, the existence of two types of idols the author speaks about here. Any idolatrous attitude is denigrating in front of God and misleads, creating a manifestation that is far away from the truth. The presence of angels, the “face to face” apparition, the presence of some energies associated with voices or the anthropomorphic appearances of some visions at Ezekiel or Daniel - all these are called Theophanies. The Church did not insist upon such things,

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only after Christ's entering history through incarnation, the Church has accepted and reconsidered the role of the presence of the icon in the cult.

The second dogmatic moment describes the transition from the unseen to the ability to see Him in the person of the Son, with His will and with the acceptance of an earthly human being, open to collaborate with the Holy Grace - pure and innocent. The Law is not annulled but an "amendment" is added, the other Person remain symbolically represented. The same symbols appear around the year 200, connected with the presence of Jesus Christ as Shepherd, Lamb and, later, by the tence of the iconoclastic controversies, the Church was obliged to research its tradition and the Scriptures in order to have efficient answers.

The third moment is connected to the Symbol from Nicaea, in he year 787. But the controversy on the theme of the icons goes up to year 843. Nicaea succeeded to give a definition and some considerations in defence of the dogma and of the cult which is being enriched with the help of these icons, being also supported by some of their apologists like John Damascene, Theodore from Studion, Athanasius of Alexandria. The main points of the definition are emphasized, with the specification that the icon is not an idol, what it represents as image, the explanation of worshipping, the scriptural substantiation, the material for representation, the similitude between type and prototype.

The second chapter, entitled "Iconography - A Lexicon" presents the Orthodox iconography as a theological, eschatological, ecclesiastical, canonical, historical, sacramental, ascetic, pedagogical and popular art - ten themes completed with iconic images. Theology in colours is an art; the way the Word can represent reality, the same way the Icon may show a perception of the Kingdom to the eye of the soul, even to reason. Some technical data bring about a plus, an addition of knowledge to the reader when different ways of painting are depicted, different perspectives for the inside - the ecclesial interpretation according to the canons, with respect for the History of Christianity, passing through phases of crisis and victory, with personality names who have left their successors real monuments, inestimable values. The icon represents all these in three directions: the artist, the icon and the on-looker. The pedagogy of the icon renders easier the approach and preparation to understand the iconic message. The Church also teaches, on an experience-level, from live theology not only academically. And the icon must not be berrayed by a sophisticated quality

exhibition of some profane artists who could prejudice the artistic act, diverting it off the sacred.

The third chapter shows us some heroes of the icon in order to create a link between sacredness and iconography. We learn about the preparation, the struggle and the triumphant finished work of some painters of icons, tools for preserving and transmitting this gift, bearers of faith, true apostles of the sacred art. There are remembered as heroes and protectors of icons those who, through their writings have justified the dogma, by suffering and confirming the Orthodox Church: Andrei Rublev, Gregory II, John Damascene, Theodore the Studite, Empress Theodora are mentioned in this context.

The annex presents some saint-painters of icons, generally Russian, concluding with two Russian documents regarding the saint-painters.

This research work brings into discussion less approached themes because the research implies great effort, dealing with icons being often made from a technical and artistical point of view, lacking “emotion”.

The development of icon-making has continued in spite of so many obstacles and true faith has remained in the hearts of the believers through the saints who considered the icon a standard, a flag and a shield of the Church, inspiring future generations.

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